KILLER SURROUND SOUND FROM CITATION

VIDEO™ MAGAZINE

INCORPORATING SOUND & IMAGE

Mission Control

RCA's Newest VCR Reaches for the Stars

THE REAL WORLD

Two Complete $599 Surround-Sound Systems Tested & Compared

WILD THING

Hitachi's 2-Piece Camcorder

REVIEWED

Panasonic 31-Inch TV
Jazz Graphics Board
NAD Preamp/Processor

USA $2.95 CANADA $3.95 UK £2.50 FEBRUARY/MARCH 1996

"Cambridge SoundWorks Home Theater For

SEVEN YEAR SPEAKER WARRANTY PARTS & LABOR

For many speaker designers and manufacturers, home theater is a relatively new idea. But the people who work at Cambridge SoundWorks - including our cofounder Henry Kloss (who also founded AR, KLH and Advent) - have been involved with the concept of home theater from the beginning. In 1969 (years before VCRs and cable TV), Henry Kloss founded Advent, the company that introduced the first home theater audio/video systems - complete with big-screen TVs and digital surround sound. We have had an ongoing relationship with the people at Dolby Laboratories, creators of Dolby Surround Sound, since Henry Kloss introduced the first consumer products with Dolby noise reduction over 20 years ago. And now at Cambridge SoundWorks we believe we have set a new price-to-performance standard for home theater components.

Because we sell carefully matched and tested home theater speaker systems factory-direct, with no expensive middlemen, you can save hundreds of dollars. We believe the products on these pages represent the country's best values in high performance home theater components. Audio critics, and thousands of satisfied customers, agree. *Stereo Review* said "Cambridge SoundWorks manufactures loudspeakers that provide exceptional sound quality at affordable prices." *Audio* suggested that we "may have the best value in the world."

Our Surround Speakers

Our Center Channel Speakers

Center Channel Speakers

Cambridge SoundWorks manufactures four speakers for use as center channel speakers in Dolby Pro Logic home theater systems. All four are magnetically shielded so they can be placed near a TV or computer monitor. *Center/Surround IV* is a compact, one-way speaker identical to our *Ensemble® IV* satellite speakers. **$49.99**. *Center/Surround III* is a small, affordable two-way speaker. **$79.99**. *Center Channel* is identical to a Cambridge SoundWorks *Ensemble* satellite (but with magnetic shielding). **$159.99**. *Center Channel Plus* uses an ultra-low, ultra-wide design that is ideal for placement above (or, with optional support stand, below) a TV monitor. **$222.99.**

Surround Speakers

Cambridge SoundWorks makes two "dipole radiator" surround sound speakers. Dolby Laboratories recommends dipole radiator speakers for use as surround speakers. *The Surround* has a very high power handling capacity and is often selected for "high end" surround sound systems. *Audio*, describing a system that included *The Surround* said "In many ways the surround sensation was every bit as good as far more expensive installations." **$399.99 pr**. The smaller *The Surround II* is arguably the country's best value in a dipole radiator speaker. **$249.99 pr.**

Our Popcorn

Opens The Way To Killer An Affordable Price." *Stereo Review*

Our Most Popular Home Theater Speaker System.

Powered Subwoofers

The original *Powered Subwoofer* by Cambridge SoundWorks consists of a heavy-duty 12" woofer housed in an acoustic-suspension cabinet with a 140-watt amplifier and a built-in electronic crossover. *Stereo Review* said it provides "deep powerful bass...31.5 Hz bass output was obtainable at a room-shaking level... they open the way to having a 'killer' system for an affordable price." **$699.99.**

Our Powered Subwoofers

Our *Slave Subwoofer* uses the same woofer driver and cabinet, but does not include the amplifier or crossover. It can only be used in conjunction with the *Powered Subwoofer*. **$299.99.** The new *Powered Subwoofer II* uses a 120-watt amplifier with an 8" woofer. **$399.99.**

Home Theater Speaker Systems

We have assembled a number of home theater speaker systems that consist of center channel, surround and main stereo speakers. The combination we show here is our best seller. It includes our critically acclaimed *Ensemble* dual subwoofer satellite speaker system, our *Center Channel Plus* and a pair of our best surround speakers, *The Surround*. You could spend hundreds more than its **$1,219.97** price without improving performance.

Complete Home Theater Sound Systems

We offer a range of complete home theater surround sound systems, ranging from **$649.98 to $3,069.93.** The system shown here is incredibly easy to hook up and to use. It consists of an Aiwa center unit that includes a Dolby Pro Logic receiver, CD changer, dual cassette deck, remote control – and our *Ensemble IV Home Theater* speaker system. It sounds great, fits into any room, and sells for an introductory price of only **$899.99.**

Our Featured Home Theater Sound System

Factory-Direct Savings

The speakers in this ad are available only directly from Cambridge SoundWorks, and through cost-efficient Best Buy stores – so you can save hundreds of dollars. Order them, then listen in your own homes. If you aren't completely satisfied, return them within 30 days for a full refund.

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We've just released a picture that's better than anything you'd see here.

SHARPVISION

Ladies and gentlemen, you are cordially invited to the next showing of SharpVision. Now, thanks to our Super High Brightness, we've got a picture that combines razor-sharp clarity with a brightness that surpasses most movie theaters. And it's playing in a place where the popcorn's better anyway... your own home. No bulky boxes. No three beam convergence headaches. Just 40", up to a massive 200", of crisp, bright picture. So if you really want to see a memorable picture, don't go to the movies. Go to a SharpVision dealer. Call 1-800-BE-SHARP. Or visit our web site at http://www.sharp-usa.com. Then sit back, relax and enjoy the show.

LCD

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CIRCLE NO. 77 ON READER SERVICE CARD

FEBRUARY/MARCH 1996

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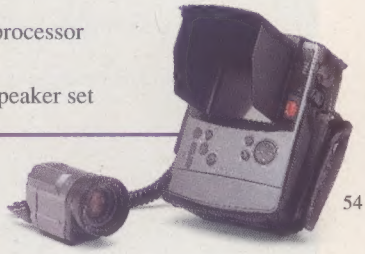
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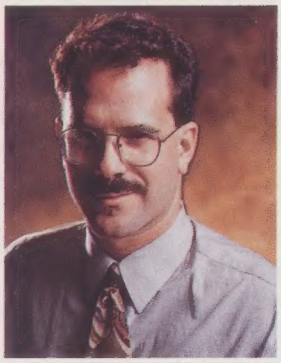

■ IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT VIDEO or electronic entertainment figures in a life-and-death story, and rarer still when we get to tell it. So much of what we do revolves around hobbies and leisure time—passion-filled and well deserved (respectively), of course, but not exactly the preserve of the human spirit. So when we heard about a video-driven virtual playspace called Starbright World and its therapeutic effect on seriously ill children, we felt a natural inclination to share it with you. That Steven Spielberg, General Norman Schwartzkopf, and four generous corporations opened their hearts and donated their resources to this cause will be no surprise when you've finished reading "Star Power" (which begins on page 33). ■ Helping out in our traditional role of news-bringer, reviewer, and tip-giver, Jim Lindner, president of a tape-restoration firm, tells you how you can preserve your videotapes in "Sticking Point" (page 50). Follow his advice and—flood, fire, or locust swarm aside—you won't need his services. ■ "Little Big Men" (page 22), Dan Kumin's evaluation of two complete surround-sound systems that retail for a mere $599, can help you preserve your store of cash (or credit) should your budget or level of interest in surround sound close the door on pricey AC-3, THX, or "separate" audio gear. The good news is that these two systems offer plenty of bang for relatively few bucks. ■ "SoftWire" (page 63), as always, can help you preserve your sanity: Turn off the flotsam that makes up the lion's share of network and cable-TV programming and feast on our reviewers' latest favorites. And don't miss the movie picks in "Off the Air" (page 100); if you're single, they should help you preserve your dignity on the marketing concept known as Valentine's Day. As we used to say when I Was a Teenage Audio Salesman, love hertz. ■

Bill Wolfe

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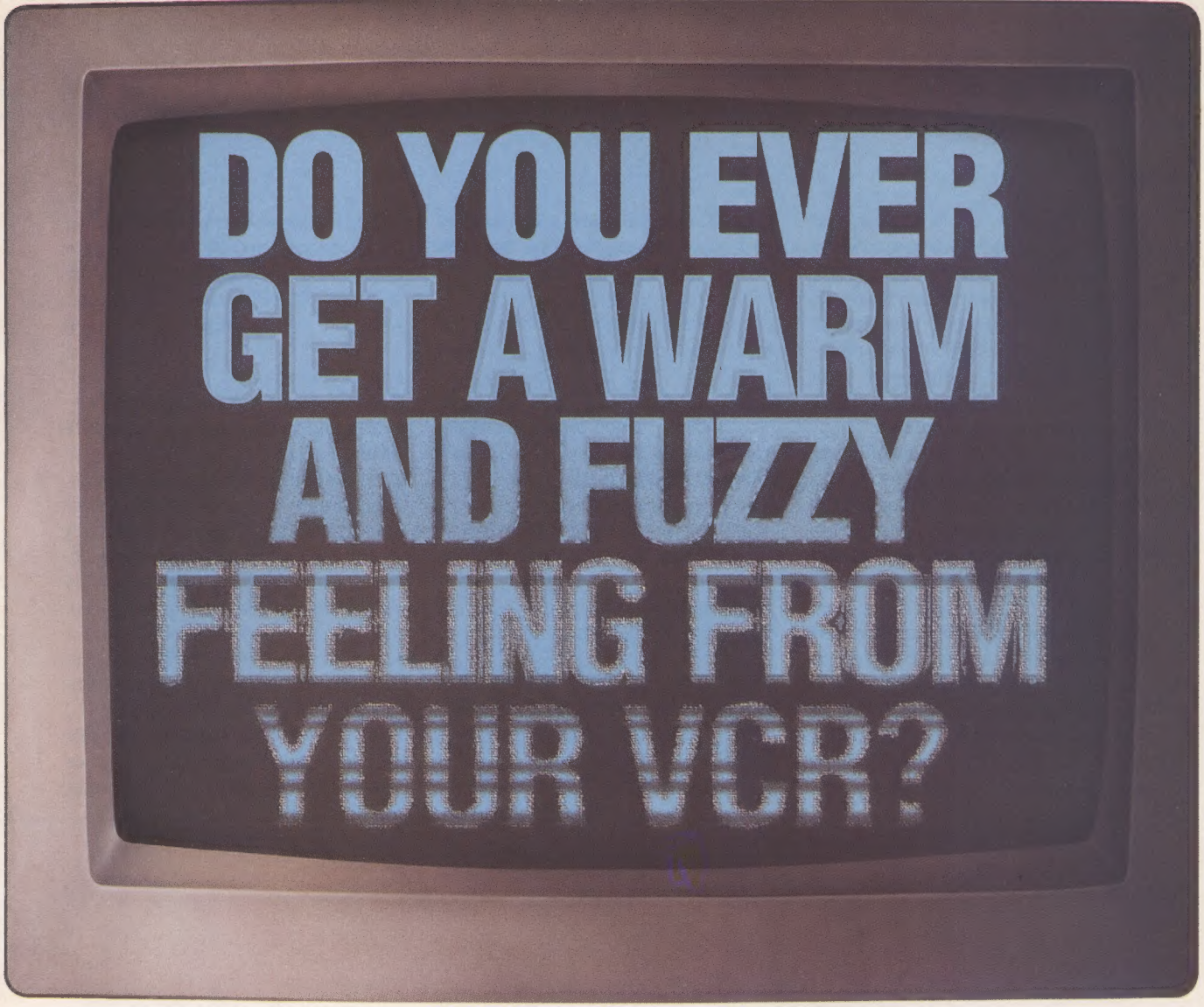
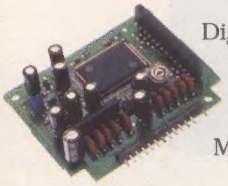


Introducing the Toshiba M781, The First VCR with Digital Noise Reduction.

Ever notice that the more a video is played, the fuzzier the image becomes? You've certainly noticed that old videos have more "snow" than new videos. And until now, the only thing you could do was sit back and watch.

Toshiba introduces Digital Noise Reduction (DNR), available only on the Toshiba M781 VCR. The DNR circuit examines each frame of the picture, finds the noise elements and removes them - restoring old and worn tapes to near their original clarity. It also sharpens dull, faded video images.



DNR circuit - the brains behind the Toshiba M781.

With the DNR circuit engaged, the M781 offers the finest picture playback quality of any VHS VCR. Which is especially important on big screen and projection TVs. To sharpen quality further, the M781 features 6 video heads and 2 audio heads. At 19 microns wide, the V3 video heads are the world's narrowest, ensuring a clear signal.

Conventional

Digital Noise Reduction

"Snow" and interference seen on older, worn tapes. (Simulated picture) Toshiba's advanced DNR restores them to almost original condition.

You could even say that the M781 is the difference between watching an old movie and enjoying a classic.

Take a close look at Digital Noise Reduction, the most advanced video technology available. You'll see that it takes the worst video on the shelf to demonstrate the best VCR on the market.

Until then, that warm, fuzzy feeling should be telling you something.

In Touch with Tomorrow

TOSHIBA

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CIRCLE NO. 65 ON READER SERVICE CARD

START WARS

Regarding reader Mike Kuhlmann's comment that people who bought the $250 all-CAV *Star Wars* box are "poor souls" ["Force of Habit," "Feedback," December 1995], Kuhlmann ignores the box's many benefits—the new transfer, special effects with all LD players, the incredibly generous supplements, the companion audio commentaries, and its collector's-item status. I'm not rich, but if there's a laserdisc set worth $250, it's this box.

Michael A. Hernandez Jr.
West New York, NJ

Mike Kuhlmann laments the "massive" all-CAV *Star Wars* box, but he forgot to mention that these three films—which may have the most exquisite sound, music, and effects in the history of modern cinema—don't have AC-3 encoding! Is George Lucas saving that edition for another round at our wallets?

Kevin Fletcher Tweedy
Oakland, CA

AC-3 encoding wasn't available at the time of the box's production. —Ed.

TURN THE RAGE

Since AC-3 is all the rage these days, I was thinking about jumping onboard with a first-generation model—until I saw your review of Yamaha's RX-V2090 A/V receiver and DDP-1 add-on AC-3 decoder [December 1995]. I was under the impression that AC-3 had full-range surround channels, but your review indicated that they were cut off at about 7,000 Hz, just like DPL.

Peter M. Shepard
Livermore, CA

The AC-3 spec calls for full-range surround channels; our 7,000-Hz figure referred to the V2090's surround performance in Dolby Pro Logic mode. Measurements for AC-3 weren't included because Dolby only recently made AC-3 test software available; future tests of AC-3 gear will include full AC-3 measurements. —Ed.

I own Yamaha's RX-V2090 A/V receiver and am thinking of getting the companion DDP-1 AC-3 decoder. Will I need an additional amp for the rear channels? I've heard that AC-3 sends full-range information to all channels,

VIDEO welcomes your comments and suggestions
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VideoMag@aol.com

A lot of companies put Home Theater in a Box.

Most brands of "Home Theater in a Box" are little more than a bunch of components thrown together in a shipping carton. For Celestion, Home Theater in a Box HTiB means integrating everything you need for Home Theater into a sub-woofer/control module that contains six built-in amplifiers and a Dolby Pro Logic® decoder. Celestion's HTiB also comes with four speakers (two front and two rear); a center channel dialog speaker; all the necessary

and I know that my receiver sends 100 watts to the three front channels and only 35 watts to the two rear channels.

Peter Strigen
Seattle
Youk-Ho@msn.com

Dan Kumin examined this issue in "Surrounded, Part III" (November 1995). His conclusion: 40 watts or so of continuous power should be fine in most AC-3 systems, especially if the AC-3 decoder's crossover is used to route sub-80-Hz signals away from them. In our test of the V2090 (December 1995), we measured its real-world rear-channel power at 45 watts into 8 ohms. —Ed.

PET SEAL

In response to reader JM Venezia's letter ["Waterworld," "Feedback," November 1995], Sony may not sell a kit that can be used to replace the seals and coolant of his rear-projection TV, but many other manufacturers—including Philips—certainly do. I've been replacing these parts for 4 years—at between $175 and $250, it's much more economical than buying a new set.

Chris Kennedy
Owner, Frank's TV
Key West, FL

BASSIC ABLE

Your comparison of 11 subwoofers ["Bassic Instinct," December 1995] had a good blend of the technical and "plain English," and the price range of $750 to $1,000 was, um, right on the money. In short, I liked the style: all information and a feeling of objectivity.

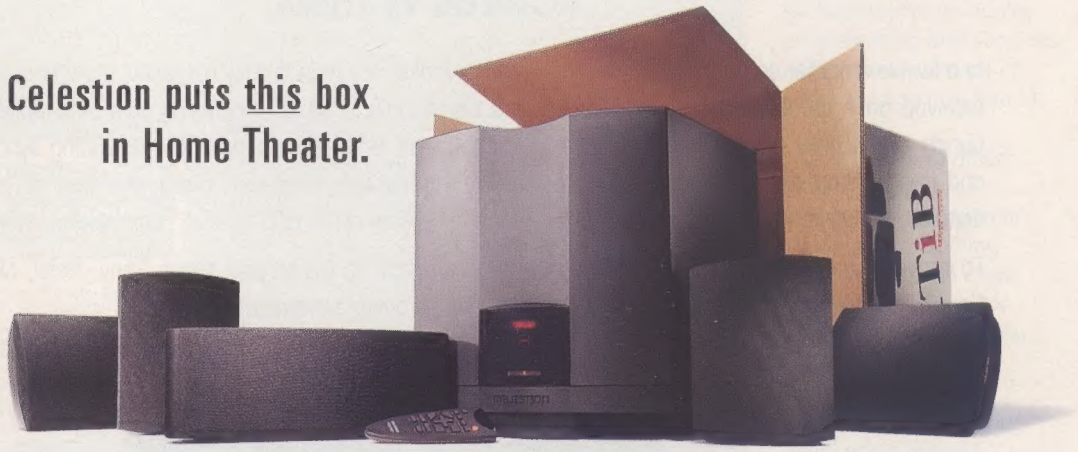
David Ta
david.ta@gpo.canada.cdev.com

BEDFELLOWS

"Bedtime Story" [December 1995], your thesis on Bedroom Theater, was long overdue. My wife and I have a home theater in our living room, and I have one in my home office, but until a year ago, the set we watch the most—the one that's in our bedroom—had only the most basic amenities. In the process of updating one of my A/V receivers, I ended up with a fully functional Pro Logic unit and set it up in the bedroom along with an extra set of speakers I had on hand. It was the beginning of something great—though I consider it the lowest-end system in the house, it's extremely adequate considering my minimal investment in it. Now the only problem we have in the bedroom is turning this terrific system off!

William Haupt
Pasadena, CA

Only Celestion puts this box in Home Theater.



accessories and a remote control for adjustments from your "theater" seat. (Set-up for the entire system just takes minutes.) Most importantly, this is the only Home Theater System that comes with the expertise Celestion has gained through 70 years of professional sound reinforcement experience. HTiB is what your TV has been waiting for.

CELESTION
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CIRCLE NO. 27 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Acurus Rated Number One

ACURUS vs THEM

In a twelve amplifier comparison test Video Magazine ranked the Acurus A150 amplifier number one. The Acurus received an A grade in both Sound Quality and Construction! "More importantly, this amp delivered *tons* of punch–significantly more than I expected from a '150-watt' amp. The sound had outstanding dynamic outlines and impact, trap drums and big bass events were impressively rendered. There was also an open, highly detailed, but never harsh character to the sound, with notable depth and 'space'." *Dan Kumin, Video Magazine*

To prove to yourself that the U.S. made Acurus is superior to the foreign made Sony, Rotel, NAD, Pioneer, Parasound, Carver, Adcom, etc. go to your nearest Acurus dealer for a demonstration.

VIDEO BEST OF 1996

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CIRCLE NO. 43 ON READER SERVICE CARD

High Time

AFTER MORE THAN 8 years of labor, the groundwork for taking television service in the United States from analog NTSC to digital HDTV is about to be laid. The FCC's Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service (ACATS) formally approved the Grand Alliance's HDTV system and urged the Commission to adopt it.

Spokespeople for the Alliance and ACATS acknowledge that there were many compromises in the system's development, but most agree that the technology is world-class. Executives from Microsoft, Apple, and DEC noted the computer industry's serious concern over the system's use of interlaced and progressive scanning, saying it would limit compatibility between digital TVs and PCs. And a Time Warner executive expressed the cable-TV industry's concern over whether standard-definition digital TV technology had been tested thoroughly enough.

In Washington, it's now the FCC's task to decide what role it should play—if any—in jump-starting the new technology. In a recent VIDEO interview ["Public Advocate #1," January 1996], Reed Hundt, the FCC's chairman, said that the market should decide how—or if—it will implement HDTV. But it may not be that simple.

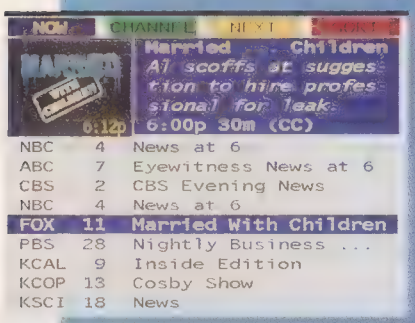
In the early stages of the HDTV debate held in the 1980s, the FCC said it would just give every station a second channel for HDTV use. At that time, however, HDTV was simply going to be a means of transmitting better free over-the-air TV. The Alliance's HDTV system blossomed into something far greater—it's now a generous conduit for high-technical-quality programming and services of all types . . . many of which wouldn't be free to consumers.

Congress and others in Washington are now reconsidering their position on allocating channels for HDTV use. Senator Larry Pressler (R–SD), chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, wants to auction the channels or exact some form of payment for them.

Should the FCC decide to give broadcasters the new channels, the Commission will then have to decide whether to impose minimum requirements for HDTV broadcasting. Initially,

Reboot

GEMSTAR HAS TEAMED with Rupert Murdoch's *TV Guide* to reinvent Guide Plus+, the on-screen program guide Gemstar was expected to launch this spring ["Guided Tour," "Fast Forward," September 1995]. The newly christened TV Guide Plus+ combines all of the features expected for Guide Plus+—including a PIP-type window integrated into the on-screen text guide—with *TV Guide*'s penchant for accurate and value-added television listings. The new deal isn't expected to delay the guide's rollout.



TV Guide Plus+ differs from its main competitors, StarSight and VideoGuide ["Tour Guides," December 1995], in three important ways: It will be available only as a decoding chip built into new TVs, VCRs, and TV/VCRs, at a premium currently pegged at $50 to $100; StarSight is available as a chip or as a set-top box, while VideoGuide is available only as a set-top box. There will be no service charge; both StarSight and VideoGuide charge roughly $50 a year for their services. And TV Guide Plus+ listings will only be available in 48-hour chunks; both StarSight and VideoGuide list 7 days' worth of programming.

As in the GuidePlus+ plan, program data for TV Guide Plus+ will be transmitted via the vertical blanking interval of a number of network and cable-TV stations, including ABC, PBS, The Family Channel, and A&E. Hitachi, JVC, GoldStar, Panasonic, Mitsubishi, Philips, Sanyo, Sharp, Sony, and Zenith have licensed TV Guide Plus+.

—*Chuck Tannert*

DVD Watch

AN AGREEMENT HAS been reached on the final spec for movie and multimedia applications of the digital-videodisc format. The new format will be called DVD after all—officially, that's its name, and not an acronym.

- Along with the debate about the new format's name and royalty provisions, the issue of copy protection contributed to the delay in formalizing the final spec. (It was expected last October.) Though it still wasn't official at presstime, Philips' Copy Generation Management System was the frontrunner; CGMS prevents all digital copying.
- Dolby Labs' Dolby Surround AC-3 is officially part of the final spec. Every DVD movie will also include a 16-bit linear PCM audio track that can accommodate Dolby Pro Logic, and other channels are available for other audio uses.
- Format-coinventor Toshiba as well as Thomson say they'll be selling DVD movie players this September. Toshiba will simultaneously launch several DVD models, with an entry-level model in the range of $500 to $700. Thomson will have at least one model and is standing firm on their intention of pricing it at $499.

Format-coinventor Sony should have at least one model available by year's end; an aggressively priced model is expected. Format-coinventor Philips has said their first DVD models won't appear until early next year. Other licensees, including Hitachi, JVC, Panasonic, Pioneer, and Sharp, are expected to debut models this fall or winter.

- Music-business trade associations around the world plan to cooperate in an effort to hammer out a wishlist for audio-only DVDs. The wishlist will ultimately be forwarded to hardware manufacturers, possibly as early as this spring. But it could take software distributors some time to offer music DVDs for sale. DVD movie players may be able to play music DVDs.

Two key issues are disc size and copy management. A 3-inch disc is possible. And Nic Garnett, director general of the International Federation of Phonographic Industry, told industry newsletter *Television Digest*, "There's no such thing as a private copy anymore."

Audio-only DVDs may be based on 24-bit signals and 96,000-Hz oversampling, and the spec is likely to include provisions for stereo and multiple-channel playback. —*BW*

broadcasters insisted that they had the right to do anything they wanted with the new spectrum. Now that channel-allocation is being debated in Washington, however, broadcasters say they'll transmit at least 25 hours of free HDTV per week. What they haven't said is what they'll do with their HDTV channels for the other 123 hours in every week.

They may feel compelled to offer programming that generates revenue from consumers, since the Grand Alliance estimates that it will cost each station about $1 million to simply pass along a network's HDTV signal and as much as $6 to $8 million to fully upgrade for HDTV. Must-carry rules for cable-TV services are also being debated.

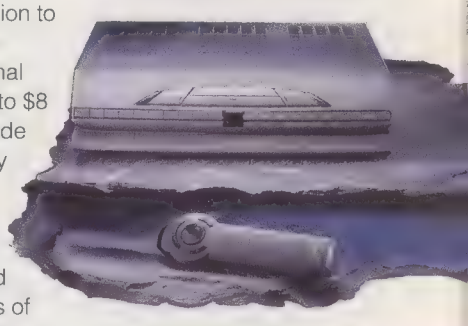
The FCC expected to begin the process of tackling these and other HDTV-related questions in January. The Commission hopes to decide on the major issues this summer.

—*Bill Wolfe*

Phone Home

BELL ATLANTIC SAYS they'll be the first of the telcos to actually deliver "video dial-tone" (VDT) service in a test program that'll start in Dover Township, New Jersey this spring. VDT shuttles hundreds of channels of digital TV as well as telephone and computer services to homes over broadband phone lines. Though Bell Atlantic currently has only about a third of Dover Township's 38,000 homes wired with fiber-optic cable "to the curb," they plan to finish the job by the end of 1997.

The system is expected to offer 384 channels of TV programming. The service will deliver 6-Mb MPEG-2 video signals. At the proverbial curb, signals will be routed to split-pair coaxial cable, which will take them into individual homes. A Philips set-top box (above) will convert the digital signal to an analog NTSC signal that can be passed to a conventional TV set.



Though Bell Atlantic has their own programming division (Bell Atlantic Video Services), the FCC ruled that the telco would have to get its VDT programming elsewhere, to ensure that local cable-TV companies would be able to compete on an even playing field. So 192 channels of Bell Atlantic's VDT programming will be supplied by Rainbow Programming, a subsidiary of Cablevision, while relative newcomer FutureVision will provide another 92 channels.

Michael Losch, executive director of Bell Atlantic New Jersey, says the project is a prelude to a potentially full-bore rollout: "This is an opportunity for us to gauge whether people want VDT service and how much they might be willing to pay for it." —*CT*

Tube Tide

SONY AND THOMSON, parent company of RCA, GE, and ProScan, recently offered a glimpse of next-generation TV sets to journalists in New York City. Thomson showed a working prototype of RCA's Genius Theatre TV/MPC hybrid, while Nobuyuki Idei, Sony president and COO, discussed his company's vision of a similar product during his keynote address at the Worldwide TV Summit.

Thomson's demonstration, which centered on a large, console-type 35-inch TV with a built-in CD-ROM changer and a wireless full-size keyboard (left), impressed attendees. A Thomson executive stepped through several applications, including playback of an edutainment CD-ROM and interaction with the World Wide Web, and the prototype responded smoothly throughout; Web text was easily readable for the short duration in which it was displayed.

Operation was simplified by the wireless keyboard and a new on-screen interface, which was based on the cartoon living-room motif first seen with Thomson-brand big-screen TVs in 1995. Sources could be selected simply by clicking on their cartoon likenesses.

Genius Theatre is "still in the conceptual stage," according to Thomson. It could be offered for sale in 1997 or 1998.

• Sony's Idei didn't reveal specifics about his company's plans for an "Intelligent TV," but his comments encompassed computer processing, online accessibility, and the ability to display full-motion video from CD-ROMs and, by extension, multimedia DVDs.

Ease of use is a major issue for Sony. When discussing the company's plans to sell consumer-grade PCs this fall [see "New Kid," page 69], Idei was highly critical of the ergonomics of current PCs and MPCs: "I'm not so interested in today's personal computer. . . . It's difficult to use." —*BW*

THE NUMBER

40,000

Amount, in dollars, the FCC fined San Francisco's KBHK-TV for airing too many commercials during programming for children.

V-Files

SONY'S TV-BUILDING facility in Pittsburgh, purchased from **Volkswagen** in 1990 and currently their global headquarters for the design and manufacture of rear-projection TVs, is being expanded to build 35-inch tubes and direct-view TV sets, the company's first in that screen-size category. . . . **3M** will stop selling video and audio tape by the end of the year, citing unprofitability due to "intense" price competition. . . . **DirecTV** planned to show letterbox versions of *Batman Forever*, *The Santa Clause*, *Crimson Tide*, and other movies on a trial basis last December and January at $2.99 a pop; "If we receive a positive response," says Larry Chapman, DirecTV's senior v.p. of programming, "we can make letterbox movies an ongoing option". . . . **JVC** has doubled its stake in Hughes–JVC Technology Corporation and will now oversee R&D and manufacturing of **Hughes**' light-amplifier projection-TV technology; no word on whether a JVC consumer version is forthcoming. . . . **Capital Cities/ABC** says they'll begin delivery of a 24-hour news network in 1997 via cable, phone lines, or some other new technology; **Rupert Murdoch**, chairman of News Corp., is contemplating a similar move, as are **Microsoft** and **NBC**. . . . **CNN** plans to launch a 24-hour Spanish-language edition of CNN International in Latin America next spring. . . . Buy Saban's *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers All-Time Favorites* on VHS and you'll find a coupon for a free **Slurpee**.

—*Bob St. Nice*

Glass Action

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF the sizable influx of working capital that accompanied their acquisition by South Korea's LG Electronics (parent company of GoldStar), Zenith plans to spend $150 million to expand production in their Melrose Park, Illinois tube-manufacturing plant (left).

Albin Moschner, Zenith's president and CEO, says the new line will initially be dedicated to 32-inch and larger 4:3-aspect-ratio tubes. Moschner adds that the expanded facility will manufacture 34- and 38-inch 16:9-aspect-ratio sets in the future if there's a market for them.

Still one of the largest TV suppliers in the world, Zenith has been buying large-screen tubes from other manufacturers. By expanding their infrastructure, the company hopes to become more competitive in the rapidly expanding big-screen marketplace. Moschner says the new line should be online in 1997. —*Marc Horowitz*

take the shuttle ▲

Sony's SLV-980HF VHS Hi-Fi VCR ($699) features the StarSight on-screen programming guide, cable-box control, auto clock-setting, and a preprogrammed multibrand remote control. Jog/shuttle controls are provided on the front panel and remote. The AVP II system is said to automatically optimize picture parameters. The back panel offers one RCA A/V input/output set and a Control-S editing input; the front panel provides a set of RCA A/V inputs. *Circle 100 on reader service card*

◄ lost and found

Magnavox's FP5370G 53-inch rear-projector ($2,900) includes the Remote Locator, which takes the mystery out of finding your remote. The FP5370G also features the Smart Sound volume leveler, Smart Picture modes, a six-speaker sound system (including a center-channel speaker), advanced PIP, and a universal remote. The rear panel includes two RCA A/V input/output sets, one S-Video input, and a center-channel input. A front-panel A/V input set is on tap. *Circle 101 on reader service card*

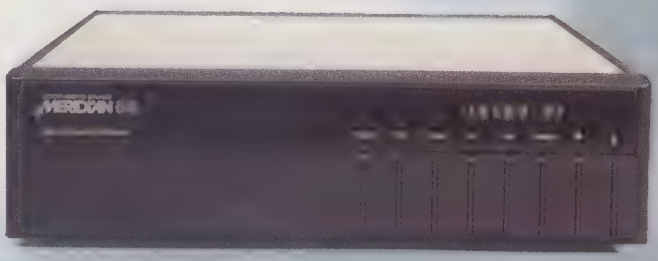
on a mission ▶

Add a TV plus main and surround speakers to Mission's M-Time ($3,995) and you have a home-theater system. The M-Time combines a Dolby Pro Logic decoder, a center speaker, stereo subwoofers, an AM/FM tuner, space for two A/V components, and nine channels of amplification in one compact cabinet; total power is rated at 500 watts rms. Measuring 19 x 28 x 16 inches (h/w/d) and weighing 85 pounds, the M-Time has space for a 30-inch or smaller TV, connections for up to five components, main/surround speaker terminals, and controls for a second listening room or zone. *Circle 102 on reader service card*

á là mode ▼

Yamaha's DSP-A3090 A/V integrated amplifier ($2,499) incorporates Dolby Surround AC-3 and Dolby Pro Logic decoders and offers a total of 30 surround modes, six of which are designed specifically for AC-3-encoded programming. The 3090 delivers 80 watts rms to each of five channels and 25 watts rms to each of two effects channels. Rear-panel connections include inputs for up to 10 components, five of which have both analog and digital connectors; two optical digital inputs are also provided. *Circle 103 on reader service card*

BY CHUCK TANNERT



converted nice

Meridian's Model 518 digital audio processor ($1,650) is designed to optimize the playback capabilities of digital A/V sources through improved A/D and D/A conversion techniques. The 518 includes four digital inputs and outputs, 72-bit digital level adjustment (+12 to −99 dB), selectable digital pre-emphasis, and selectable channel-status modes. An RS-232 serial port is provided for computer management. *Circle 104 on reader service card*

two-timing

Go Video's GV-4060 VCR ($900) has two VHS Hi-Fi tape transports; each transport has four video heads. The unit includes a 181-channel tuner, an MTS stereo decoder, a commercial-skip function, and a universal remote with jog/shuttle controls. Editing features include multi-scene automatic editing and the EZ COPY mode. *Circle 105 on reader service card*

bass is the place

M&K's THX-certified MX-150THX powered subwoofer ($1,195) employs Headroom Maximizer I circuitry and a rated 150-watt amplifier to deliver bass that's said to extend below 20 Hz. The sub, which measures 23 x 15.25 x 19.6 inches (h/w/d) and weighs 74 pounds, features two 12-inch drivers in a push-pull configuration and a fixed 80-Hz low-pass filter with a slope of 24 dB per octave. *Circle 106 on reader service card*

slim jam

Sporting a slim, space-friendly cabinet, Quasar's SP2727 27-inch TV ($520) features single-tuner PIP and stereo sound with dbx noise reduction. The set's SuperBlack picture tube and precision notch filter are said to deliver 500 lines of horizontal resolution. The remote control can be programmed to operate most VCRs and cable boxes. A set of variable-audio output jacks simplifies use with an A/V receiver in a home theater. *Circle 107 on reader service card*

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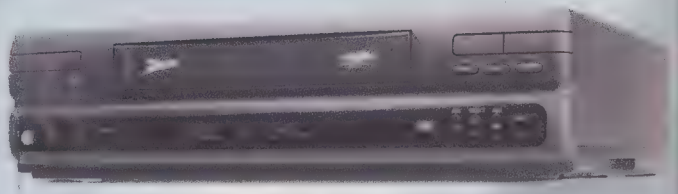
plus stop ▸

Zenith's VR4255HF VHS Hi-Fi VCR ($350) includes the VCR Plus+ programming system for one-time, daily, or weekly recording. The four-head 4255 also features an MTS stereo decoder, multilanguage on-screen displays, a universal remote control, digital picture tracking, an eight-event/1-year timer, and front-panel A/V inputs. *Circle 108 on reader service card*



◂ home bass

Sonance's PSWD8 passive in-wall subwoofer ($329) is said to install easily in virtually any home. The sub features an 8-inch woofer and dual voice coils. A low-pass filter offers a 125-Hz cutoff and a slope of 18 dB per octave; a high-pass filter offers a 150-Hz cutoff and a slope of 6 dB per octave. Rated power handling is 60 watts per channel, nominal impedance is 6 ohms, and efficiency is 88 dB (1 watt/1 meter). *Circle 109 on reader service card*

personal touch ▸

MB Quart simplifies the process of integrating speakers in the home with their Domain line. Each speaker in the line can be paired with frames in one of 11 finishes. The line is comprised of eight models, including three bookshelf models ($299 to $599 a pair), two towers ($699 or $899 a pair), one powered subwoofer ($649), one center speaker ($399), and one surround model ($399 a pair). One four-piece system ($1,399) and one six-piece system ($1,899) are also available. *Circle 110 on reader service card*

◂ watt price glory?

Bryston's THX-certified 5B ST amplifier ($2,495) is rated to deliver 120 watts into each of three channels at 8 ohms or 200 watts per channel at 4 ohms. It can also be bridged for two-channel operation; in this configuration, output is rated at 400 watts x 1 plus 120 watts x 1, both at 8 ohms. The 5B employs three independent power supplies and accommodates bi- or triamping. Features include gold-plated connectors, balanced or unbalanced operation, and a ground-lift switch. *Circle 111 on reader service card* ■

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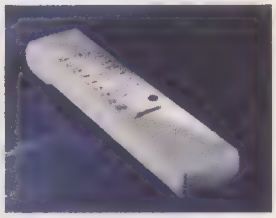

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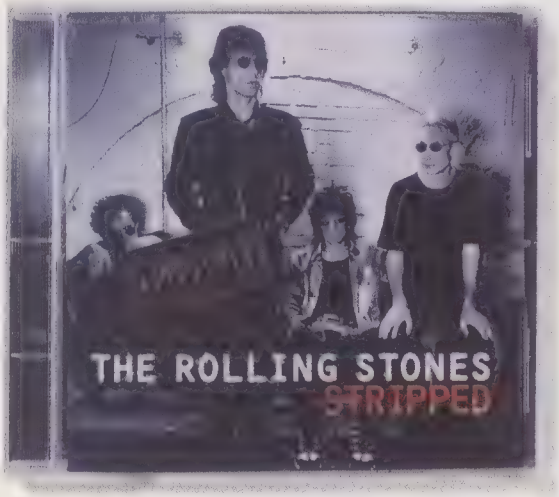
Do hybrid Enhanced CDs deliver on the promise of added value?

A BREED APART

SOMETIMES A GOOD THING DOESN'T look so good at first. Forget the obvious jokes about spouses, and instead consider this fact: The launch of the compact disc in 1982 was accompanied by a lot of trepidation and more than a little pessimism. Though sales of LPs had been trending down, the numbers were still huge, and many people believed that the LP still had several strong decades ahead of it. The CD, on the other hand, was an unproven, incompatible upstart. In the first year of the CD's existence, only 35,000 players were sold. (Compare that to the 700,000 or so DSS systems sold in that format's first year of existence.) Within 5 years, of course, the CD was a solid success and the LP was road kill.



The CD-ROM format wasn't an overnight success either; its climb to acceptance took a decade. In the beginning, it seemed that only the Pentagon and a few librarians needed access to the huge portable databases that CD-ROMs represented. CD-ROM players were expensive and slow, and the many incompatible file formats were a nightmare. Once cost, speed, and compatibility issues were resolved, however, the format (surprise!) took off. When videogames and other full-motion video titles hit the shelves, CD-ROM exploded. In today's consumer market, sales of personal computers are huge and accelerating, and virtually every self-respecting machine comes bundled with a CD-ROM player. And today the sales growth of CD-ROM titles far exceeds the numbers associated with CD titles.

The executives who pilot the software companies aren't satisfied with their profits, of course. And though the nascent digital-videodisc (DVD) format and its video, audio, and multimedia applications will appear for your inspection within the next 6 to 12 months, software companies are continuing their efforts to expand both the CD and CD-ROM markets—the CD-ROM market in particular.

Companies have tried for several years to develop a hybrid-disc standard that included both music and ROM data. There's considerable wisdom in this pursuit. First, there's no question that the audio/video and multimedia/computer industries are rapidly merging into a unified entertainment industry. As any investment banker can tell you, formerly independent corporations have been stitched together to produce movie, video, music, and multimedia titles under a single corporate umbrella. The Sony family, for example, includes Sony Television Entertainment, Sony Music Entertainment, Sony Pictures Entertainment, and Sony Interactive Entertainment. In many cases, the same company also manufactures consumer-electronics and computer hardware and software, and may even own cable or broadcasting interests. That's why we increasingly see a theatrical motion-picture release accompanied by its soundtrack, videogame, and Web page. (It's only a matter of time before these companies begin to manufacture action figures and souvenir glasses.)

Second, there's considerable industry enthusiasm for a hybrid disc because sales of CD-ROM discs are still limited by a relative scarcity of retail outlets. Sure, computer stores are becoming fixtures on Main Street and in malls, but CD-ROM developers dream of the day when record stores indiscriminately carry CD-ROM titles alongside CDs.

Optimists say that day has arrived, in the guise of the Enhanced CD (ECD). Though various corporate entities prefer to call the new format CD Plus (or even the appallingly bland Stamped Multisession), most have settled on Enhanced CD. These discs contain a full album of music and are enhanced with ROM material; the enhancements include things like music videos, interviews, and screen-savers.

The engineering of ECDs was relatively straightforward: The CD-ROM standard is derived from the CD-Audio standard; 98 CD frames are summed (as in CD subcode) to form a data block of 2,352 bytes (24 bytes x 98 frames). Each disc is divided into a maximum of 330,000 blocks; a 60-minute disc holds 283,500 blocks. Because of their common heritage, music discs can be played on CD-ROM players, though CD-ROM discs can't be played on CD players. A CD-ROM player could dispense with D/A conversion, output filtering, and audio output stages, but requires an interface and a host computer. In practice, the consolidation of both functions into one CD-ROM player is cost-effective. For that reason, virtually all CD-ROM players are audio/computer hybrids.

Hybrid audio/CD-ROM hardware is easy to design and build, so it would appear that hybrid audio/CD-ROM software should be easy, too. The CD-ROM format accommodates both data types

BY KEN C. POHLMANN

because it inherently defines a format for *general* data storage—that is, CD-ROM, unlike CD-Audio, isn't tied to any specific application. A CD-ROM disc holds 682 MB of user information (equivalent to 470 1.44-MB floppies), and that capacity accommodates absolutely any type of 1 or 0. So, in theory, it's easy for a CD-ROM player to play an Enhanced CD because the player automatically differentiates between audio and CD-ROM data (a CD-ROM disc automatically distinguishes itself from an audio CD through the Q subcode channel). And the player knows how to deal with each data type.

CD players are lower on the evolutionary scale, however, and designers discovered that some were unable to differentiate between audio and CD-ROM data. Older players, specifically, aren't capable of muting the CD-ROM data. Try to play back the enhanced part of an ECD on such a player and the result will be a loud burst of digital noise, startled listeners, blown tweeters, wrecked cars, and other things that corporate lawyers frown upon. That posed a question for engineers: Where do you put the audio and CD-ROM tracks on an ECD?

The answer was to put the audio data on the first track or on the first few tracks. This area is a complete session, with lead-in and lead-out tracks as in a conventional CD. It could then be followed by a minute or two of silent, empty sectors. These are followed by a second session broken into tracks of CD-ROM data, starting with track one in the second session. A CD player plays the first music session normally, then stops. It won't go any further on its own because all CD players are single-session devices; it's effectively blind to the second session and its CD-ROM data. (You can manually scan forward to the second session, but if you do all you'll hear is that loud blast of digital noise I mentioned.)

A CD-ROM player with multisession capability can read both sessions. The fly in the jelly: Older CD-ROM players aren't multisession devices, and can't read the second session; the only thing you'll get out of them when you spin an ECD is the audio session. Fortunately, these players are quickly being retired in the fast-paced PC world.

It's key to remember that the CD-ROM programming on an ECD is there simply to enhance the music—not the other way around. A typical music album might run 60 minutes, leaving about 14 minutes—or about 150 MB of capacity—for CD-ROM programming. Consider your CD collection: There are probably many gigabytes of empty disc space there. Enhanced CD puts that empty disc space to work. The catch: You need a multimedia computer to enjoy the enhancements.

EARLIER, I NOTED THAT IT'S EASY FOR CD-ROM players to play ECDs—*in theory*. The reality isn't always so neat. Though Macs have always been CD-ROM-friendly, PCs have not. In fact, it's always been a pain in the butt to configure a PC to welcome a new CD-ROM player, and sometimes it's even painful to play particular titles. MSCDEX.EXE is an *MS-DOS* extension available from Microsoft; it contains extension programming and drivers so that an *MS-DOS* program can access a CD-ROM. A PC requires both Microsoft extensions and the device-driver for the CD-ROM player. MSCDEX.EXE is often placed in the AUTOEXEC.BAT file, and the device-driver is loaded from CONFIG.SYS. The computer may then read CD-ROM file directories and files from a disc. Bottom line: You can read ECDs within *Windows 3.1*, but you need a special device-driver—and the personal wherewithal to manually manipulate these files.

ECD manufacturers are braced for lots of confusion and returned discs, and they should be. CDs are foolproof, but CD-ROMs—and ECDs—aren't. A recent industry report found retailers claiming that 30 to 40 percent of all ECDs sold are being returned as defec-

WEB WATCH

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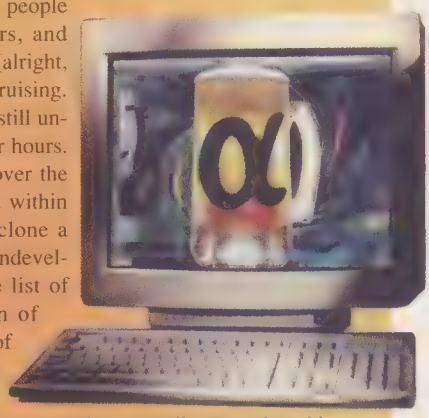

AlphaWorld is vast. Though most of it is still undeveloped, you can wander its cityscape for hours. Or you can ascend and hover or even fly over the terrain at warp speeds. You can also build within AlphaWorld: Use a simple technique to clone a piece of building material, drag it to an undeveloped plot, and put it down. Then use the list of building materials to start construction of everything from doors and roofs to mugs of beer. Once you put down stakes, you own that place, and only you can build on it. You can put down a mailbox, so that visitors can send you email, or maybe add some links to cool Web sites.

AlphaWorld is also filled with sound. Objects can be tagged with either MIDI or .WAV files. If you see a burning torch, for example, you can hear the appropriate crackling noises; the image of a waterfall can be paired with the sound of falling water. If you build a place of your own, you can tag objects in it with music—as you approach a sound source, the volume increases, then decreases as you move away.

Even better, AlphaWorld is free—provided you have the requisite computer gear. You'll need at least a 486/66 (Pentium preferred), 8 MB of RAM, 20 MB of disk space, *Windows* with at least 256 colors, and a full Internet connection. Visit AlphaWorld's web page (**http://www.worlds.net/alphaworld/**), register your citizenship, and download the latest software version. Then log on, and meet me in my AlphaWorld office. There's always beer on the table, frothy, cold, and free. —*KCP*

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tive, primarily because their owners couldn't get them to work in their PCs.

The booklet packed inside *Stripped*, the recent ECD by The Rolling Stones, disclaims, "No guarantees: The i-trax program is provided to the purchaser without any guarantees or warranties of any kind. Virgin Records [the Stones' current label] and/or AIX Entertainment, Inc. shall not be liable for any direct, indirect, or consequential damages arising out of the use or inability to use this CD." In other words, if it doesn't work, it's your problem. Another note inside the package acknowledges that the disc's three videos—all previously released on the Stones' *Voodoo Lounge* CD-ROM, by the way [see "SoftWire," page 70]—are incompatible with "some" of NEC's CD-ROM players and the Mac PCI bus. These facts are bogus enough, but at least Virgin should have had the guts to put them on the outside of the package, where a consumer could consider them in the buying decision.

All of this should change with *Windows 95*, because it fully supports the Enhanced CD format. *Windows 95*'s AutoPlay feature installs and runs ECDs automatically (as well as AutoPlay-coded CD-ROMs): When an ECD is loaded, the system checks for a text file called AUTORUN.INF in the root directory, which contains directions for running the application. In short, when you load an ECD, it should play without any gyrations on your part—unless it's platform-specific . . . and not your platform.

IN THE END, TECHNICAL HURDLES WILL prove to be the easy part. ECD's real task is convincing us that we really need it. Content is key: Clearly, a music CD with a bad low-resolution video tacked on at the end will be mildly interesting for only one viewing. Another path to failure is to use the unused data area to cynically recycle old albums, in the hope of enticing customers to pay for the same music again. And it's inevitable that some content-providers will use ECDs as just another advertising medium. We will be glad to watch these purveyors crash and burn.

To be truly exciting, enhancements must capture the true meaning of multimedia, and truly improve on the audio-only listening experience. A movie soundtrack, for example, could be accompanied by high-quality stills that are linked to the music (a *Forrest Gump* multimedia soundtrack is in the works). A rock album could provide photos of the recording session, interviews, liner notes, lyrics, high-quality music videos, or live videos (The Rolling Stones' *Stripped* is a primeval stab at this). Above all, an ECD must take advantage of the power of the PC—a disc could contain cool and useful programs such as screen-savers. Better still, an ECD could download hyperlinks to Web sites, so that new and refreshed materials are downloaded each time the disc is played. Creativity, or the lack of it, will determine the fate of Enhanced CD.

We can't forget cost, of course. At the risk of penning an oxymoron, some content-providers are following the MTV school of thought. They believe that the purpose of ECDs, like music videos, is to sell music. They argue that dedicated CD-ROM titles that involve music topics should sell at higher prices, and that ECDs should sell at CD prices. Others point to the cost of providing quality enhancements, and argue that it's not unreasonable to charge $20 to $30 for a really good ECD. A third alternative is to provide a freeware version of the enhanced materials, but encrypt a full-featured version; that way, only those truly interested in the enhancements would have to pay an additional fee to unlock them.

One thing is certain: In today's market, sales of PCs exceed the sales of TVs. All of these new computer users haven't abandoned audio and video entertainment—they'd just like to take it with them into the computer environment. Everyone knows that audio and video content—in the form of games and educational titles—is what has driven computer sales. ECDs provide a good opportunity to further merge the entertainment and computer worlds, leading to truly exciting new products for all of us to enjoy. In 5 years, the majority of new music CDs will be enhanced . . . or the entire concept will be forgotten. Remembering full well all of the industry's broken promises to code video in CD subcode, I predict that ECDs are here to stay—though DVD versions will be the standard-bearers. ■

Component-video signals in a digital-video world

MIXED SIGNALS

IN MY INAUGURAL COLUMN ["GOAL Tending," January 1996], I discussed the potential for the digital videodisc (DVD) to bring improved video quality to average consumers and to videophiles. One factor that may help DVD satisfy both types of viewers is that DVD video (and audio) will be digital. Another is that DVD starts with component video signals, rather than the composite NTSC signal we get with the LD format.

The component format delivers three channels of information: luminance (black-and-white) plus two separate channels of color information. In an inexpensive DVD player, unfortunately, these three high-quality pieces of information will be combined into a lower quality composite NTSC video signal. This conversion will be necessary to make DVD compatible with conventional TV sets designed for use in the United States; in the U.S., only high-end industrial and broadcast-grade TV systems (as well as expensive line-doublers) can accept component input signals. This isn't the case in Europe, where consumer-grade TV sets can work with component or composite signals (when they've been configured with the appropriate input).

Because the vast majority of U.S. TV sets can't handle component signals, component's potential remains undeveloped. A DVD player with a component output would probably be welcomed by many home videophiles, but, most likely, only high-end video manufacturers are likely to consider building such a product. And this issue isn't confined to DVD, since a digital video format you can buy today is based on component signals. It's called DSS.

DSS programming is transmitted in digital component form. It's converted to a standard S-Video signal within the DSS receiver; the S-Video signal is in turn converted to a composite NTSC signal for use with TV sets that don't have an S-Video input.

With DSS (as it will be with DVD), the process of converting the component signals to an S-Video signal involves reduction in the amplitude and bandwidth of the two color signals. They're then modulated on two 3.58-MHz carriers. What we end up with is the luminance information (which is left undisturbed) on one wire and the two modulated color signals on another wire. When converting the S-Video signal to an NTSC composite signal, the signals on the two wires are simply added together on a single wire. Conversion introduces the potential for degradation and/or inaccuracy, so if you currently own a DSS receiver and your TV set has S-Video inputs, you should use them.

DSS receivers could be designed (or modified by a third party) to pick off component signals.

It's hard to fault the manufacturers of DSS systems for not providing component outputs on their DSS receivers—remember, the only consumers that could take advantage of them are those with high-quality line-doublers. And there were enough problems changing from MPEG-1 to MPEG-2 video encoding and coming up with the extra bandwidth that upgrade required.

The initial estimate of DSS bandwidth requirements was based on the fact that most consumers accept VHS-quality video. In reality, viewers complained, and higher bandwidth—and therefore fewer channels—was required to accommodate better picture quality. DSS is finally reaching a quality level that will interest videophiles—though, despite its component roots, it's never expected to equal the picture quality we should get with DVD.

All DSS channels are not created equal, however. The channels you'd get from a regular cable service are sourced from composite NTSC signals. They have to be broken back down to the component level before DSS's programmers can encode and transmit them. Once they're received by a consumer's DSS system, they're converted to S-Video and then to composite NTSC within the receiver for the reasons I've mentioned. All of this conversion is by no means transparent.

Pay-per-view services, on the other hand, might start out with the same component signals that are used to master a DVD. A DSS receiver could be designed (or modified) to pick these signals off prior to conversion to S-Video and composite NTSC and feed them directly to a TV system that can handle a component input. Picture quality would be improved because signal conversion within the DSS receiver would be avoided.

Small companies have looked into the process of modifying existing DSS receivers, but all of them have been put off by the extremely high cost of being a player in the DSS game. The DSS camp doesn't seem to want to allow smaller companies to go after the high-end market with a superior product. The modification, by the way, should be easy to accomplish—as long as there's a point in the existing integrated circuits where the component signals could be tapped. If such a point doesn't exist, we'd need a new chipset based on the existing decoder.

Perhaps this is putting the cart before the horse. Once DVD is rolled out, we'll have two digital component formats in the market. If TV makers put component inputs on conventional TV sets, makers of DSS receivers and DVD players will have every reason to put component outputs on their products. ■

BY JOE KANE

Little Big men

Two complete $599 surround-sound packages

BY DANIEL KUMIN

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT to AC-3 surround processors, THX-approved dipole speakers, separate power amplifiers, and massive 15-inch subwoofers, sprawling masses of people on the face of this fair planet want something different in a home-theater system. Something like five speakers and a subwoofer that won't devour precious living-room real estate. Or speakers that can fit in small spaces—a bedroom, dorm room, or den come to mind. They want Pro Logic decoding and amplification for all channels including the sub . . . in one easy-to-use component. They want to be able to hook it all up in an hour with nothing more than a pair of nail clippers and a normal attention span. They want the system to provide some impact and excitement. And they want it all for around five-hundred bucks. Are they dreaming? Not on your life.

Though the folks who work with home-theater gear for a living (including, alas, myself) often overlook this reality, you can be sure that home-theater manufacturers have not. Where opportunity knocks, products spring up like so many mushrooms. And so audio brands are rushing to deliver Home Theater in a Box: single-carton packages, sized and color-printed for superstore sales-floor bulk stacks, that you simply uncrate, connect to your TV or VCR, and switch on. *Voilà*—your boring old TV is almost instantly transformed into resplendent home theater! To get a grip on this reality, I rounded up Sherwood's HTS-100 and 3M's STV Digital 6, two of the first one-box systems to hit the market, spilled out their various and sundry goodies, and fired them up.

SHERWOOD HTS-100

Sherwood is a familiar audio brand. Once an American stalwart during the tube-happy '50s, the name is now owned by Inkel, a South Korean technology conglomerate. The brand has re-

PHOTOS BY TONY CORDOZA

cently earned a solid name for building no-nonsense high-value components, particularly among A/V receivers, CD players, and car stereo gear. The HTS-100 ($599) arrived at my house in a 55-pound box that's the size of a dorm-room fridge; it's emblazoned with T-Rex images reminiscent of *Jurassic Park*. Opening the flaps, I discovered a seven-piece system comprised of a conventional, reasonably full-featured A/V receiver, five identical small speakers for left, center, right, and surround duties, and the kind of sub-compact passive subwoofer that VIDEO's editors like to call a bass module. All this for $599 suggested retail?

You won't need to pop any Tylenol after toting the Sherwood bass module around.

But wait—there's more! You also get a unified remote control that commands the receiver plus any other Sherwood "Digi-link" components you own or choose to buy and hook up, precut speaker wires, an owner's manual for the receiver, a system-connection diagram, a booklet that explains the workings of Dolby Surround (the technology used to encode surround-sound cues in VHS tapes, laserdiscs, and TV broadcasts), and a VHS instructional videocassette. (*Assume voice of generic infomercial announcer: Now* how much would you pay?)

The receiver is Sherwood's RV-4050R ($299 when purchased alone), which is rated to deliver 50 watts to each front speaker and 10 watts to each surround speaker (all at 1,000 Hz, with less than 0.5 percent THD). The five speakers are SP-150S "satellites," each of which stands 7 x 5 x 5 inches (h/w/d). Surprisingly, they're "three-ways": Each satellite has a 4-inch woofer, a 2-inch midrange, and a 0.75-inch tweeter. The spec sheet quotes their sensitivity as 89 dB (1 watt/1 meter) and power handling as 60 watts, which seem well matched to the RV-4050. The SP-150W bass module measures up at 12 x 12 x 10 inches (h/w/d). It employs a 6.5-inch polylaminate-cone woofer equipped with dual voice coils; no other specs are listed, though the entire system's frequency response is quoted as 30 to 20,000 Hz (an incomplete spec that really doesn't tell you anything).

The Sherwoods are well made, considering that you're asked to spend less than $100 per item on average. The SP-150S satellites are nicely finished along standard mini-speaker lines, with buff black-plastic enclosures and fabric grilles. There's a hanging slot on the back and a supplied mounting U-bracket for each surround speaker—nice extras. The driver complement appears of decent, if inexpensive, quality, though I can't think of a good technical reason to make so small a speaker a three-way.

The SP-150W bass module is, well, cute. It's no bruiser, but its down-firing driver makes for a nice, easy-to-place package. Hookups are made via push-terminals located on the rear face. The whole business weighs only about 12 pounds—a featherweight in the subwoofer universe, but you won't need to pop any Tylenol when you're done toting it around, either.

The RV-4050R receiver

is straightforward, with simple controls and nicely understated cosmetics. A single big knob manages volume, bass, treble, and balance functions via a MODE button, *á là* current car-stereo head units; pushbuttons handle everything else, including surround modes (Pro Logic and Dolby 3-Channel) and station presets for the radio (30 are provided). There's a front-panel headphone jack. Rear-panel connections consist of CD, TV/AUX, VCR, and (audio) TAPE audio inputs; VCR is the sole video input/output, furnished in composite jacks, as is a video-monitor output. Up front, there's a convenient VCR-2 audio/video input set. Speaker connections are made via push-terminals, and a single switched AC outlet is on tap.

The supplied remote has 55 keys for controlling the receiver plus tape and CD components, but they'll all have to be Sherwoods, since there's no learning or preprogrammed multibrand ability. The remote is attractively laid out, but its keys are identically sized and shaped and its lettering is a dim gray and green, making it tough to use, especially when the room is dark.

Setting up the HTS-100 was a snap: I placed the front speaker trio three-across on furniture just above my TV, evenly spacing them over about 11 feet. The rear pair went even with the listening seat and tilted back toward the rear corners of the room, for optimal surround-sound ambience. The bass module went behind and to the left of the front-left speaker.

The HTS-100 came packed with seven generous lengths of 20-gauge zip cord, a nice touch since part of the appeal of this package is its completeness, which is designed to keep you from having to run out to the store for *anything*. I ran the wire from the receiver to the center and surround speakers as well as the bass mod; additional wire ran from the mod to the main left/right speakers. Sources included a DSS dish/receiver package as well as high-quality laserdisc and CD players.

Since the Sherwood receiver sports only one rear-panel video input, I had to run the LD player's video output to the receiver's front-panel input—no big deal, though it'd look inelegant in a permanent setup. Using a third source such as a camcorder or game system would mean plug-swapping, running video direct to the TV (not a bad idea, by the way, if it can accommodate it), or adding an inexpensive switcher. Having three video inputs on the receiver would be preferable, but you really can't complain, considering the $599 system price. I also found that the receiver did a very solid job of keeping the channels balanced over a wide master-volume range (about ±1.5 dB overall).

In terms of performance, the HTS-100 was pretty impressive, especially given its street price, which seems to have settled well below $500 (at presstime, one shop in New York City was advertising it for $399). It sounded dynamic and delivered good clarity as well as intelligible dialogue. Overall tonal balance was natural, and Pro Log-

Sherwood's RV-4050R A/V receiver

ic steering and pans were acceptably smooth and accurate, with only a bit of a notch. The RV-4050R also proved quieter than many more costly A/V receivers I've tested.

The system played plenty loud in my 20 x 12-foot living room, with clean maximum output of about 95 dB SPL at the couch. It also produced enough bass below 60 Hz to add impact and authority to big action-movie scenes. Though the HTS-100's receiver and speakers are "matched," I found that cranking the volume produced fairly flagrant distortion; the left, center, and right satellites gave up the ghost before the bass mod or, oddly, the surrounds. Overall, the HTS-100 won't impress audiophiles, but compared with the sound systems built into TVs (even some very expensive ones), it's really little short of awesome.

I must note that the HTS-100's speaker complement does suffer a bit from a few classic faults of small-bore speaker systems: a midrange that sounds slightly "cupped," a mildly spitty top two octaves, and distinctly overblown midbass. And though the little SP-150W bass module did a serviceable job, response dropped like a stone below about 45 or 50 Hz; the mod was surprisingly free from the port noise subs and mods sometimes make, but I did hear some *thwacks* as the woofer bottomed out at really high volume settings. I was able to offset the system's exaggerated midbass somewhat by moving the bass mod away from the adjacent walls, but not entirely. And because the mod produces more midbass than you'd want ideally (by ear, I'd peg the sub/satellite crossover at about 130 Hz), it can be localized; this means that the closer to the TV you can keep the mod, the more balanced and cohesive everything will sound.

One big difference between the Sherwood and 3M systems is that the former's receiver has, by definition, an FM section. FM performance was clear with strong stations, but fair to poor with weak and/or distant signals. Video signals passing through the receiver resulted in a slight but visible loss of detail and a larger loss in brightness.

3M STV DIGITAL 6

Exactly why is Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (those are the three Ms) jumping into the home-theater business? Beats me, but whatever the answer, the STV Digital 6 is an intriguing layout. And no, it's not held together with Scotch tape.

The STV ($599) arrives in a big colorfully printed box, just like Sherwood's HTS-100; instead of dinosaurs, you get carrying handles, a nice touch. Pop the top and you'll find five identical satellite speakers, a processor/amplifier, a passive bass module, and a simple remote control.

Each of the sats, which stand about 8 x 4 x 4 inches (h/w/d), has a 3.5-inch mid/woofer, a 0.5-inch dome tweeter, a black-plastic cabinet, and metal grilles.

3M's system sounded good: It played loudly, and tonal balance really was very decent.

The processor/amp has all-pushbutton controls and a simple bar-graph display of volume and channel balance; at 3 x 14 x 9 inches (h/w/d), it's just a bit larger than the average cable box. The passive sub, black in color and 14 x 8 x 18 inches (h/w/d) in size, has a large port and a single push-terminal connection. Its contents are a mystery, since no specs or technical descriptions are supplied and 3M has chosen to play things close to the vest; at a guess I'd say it's a single 8-inch driver in a bandpass enclosure.

A brief chat with 3M's designer revealed this: The processor/amp is said to deliver about 23 watts per channel (but not simultaneously; about 40 watts total is on tap) and features an active sub/sat crossover, active equalization for the satellites, and dynamics compensation to keep the sub from ripping on bass events too big for its britches.

And then there's the trimmings: an instructional videotape, six long pretinned 18-gauge cables, RCA and mini-plug interconnects, a compact remote control, and a 1-page k.i.s.s. (keep it simple, stupid) hookup and instruction sheet.

The STV's processor/amp and its remote provide up/down keys for volume, bass, treble, balance, and center- (marked FRONT) and surround-channel (BACK) volumes plus selectors for Dolby Pro Logic as well as CONCERT and THEATER surround-sound modes. The BOOST control engages "specially contoured response to the subwoofer" (in the instruction sheet's words). And there's a key that calls up DPL-standard test noise for channel-balancing.

Around back, 3M's processor/amp delivers just the basics: LEFT/RIGHT, BACK (surround), CENTER, and SUBWOOFER push-terminal speaker outputs, one set of stereo RCA-jack audio inputs, and a mini-phone stereo input for use with components that lack RCA output jacks. There's a stereo/mono switch for those adventurous souls who'd buy a surround system for use with a mono source. And there's a pair of RCA audio outputs whose potential is ignored by the instruction sheet; in practice, I found that this delivers pass-through audio from the source back to a TV or other component.

These back-panel accommodations signify a difference between the Sherwood and 3M systems: While the Sherwood lets you plug your TV and one other audio/video source (like a VCR) into its receiver, the 3M's processor/amp accepts only one component directly, which will likely be your TV. 3M's hookup sheet provides simple diagrams for connecting a stereo TV or VCR to the processor/amp, but fails to point out that the most sensible layout—if you have a modern stereo TV—is to connect any A/V components you have to the TV's video inputs and then run its pass-through audio outputs to 3M's processor/amp. Another option would be to buy a simple little A/V switcher; Radio Shack sells a nice one for about $80.

I set up the 3M system just as I had the Sherwood, with three-in-a-row front speakers and head-high, angled-back rears; the bass module again went in my room's front-left corner. Sources (connected via my A/V preamp, which I used instead of my TV's audio pass-through) included DSS broadcasts, laserdiscs, and CDs.

Fired up, the STV sounded surprisingly good. In Pro Logic mode it played loudly and remained free of audible distortion, kicking out about 93 dB SPL peak in my living room—very interesting when you compare power figures between 3M's processor/amp and Sherwood's receiver. Tonal balance was very decent on the whole. There was notably little of the boominess you often get with bass modules, even though I'd placed 3M's mod fairly close to a room corner. And I wasn't able to localize the mod too much—

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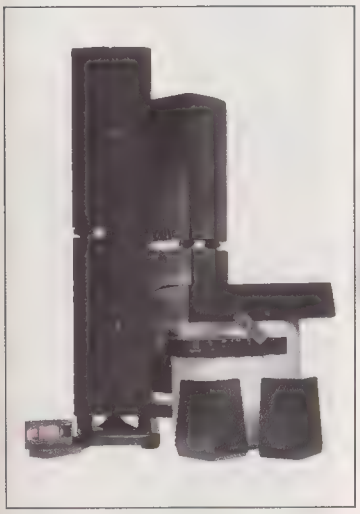

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credit the system's active crossover, perhaps, which sounds as if it rolls off at a steep 18 dB per octave. (I'd still recommend placing the mod by the TV if you can, though.) The mod also went impressively low, with what sounded like solid output down to about 40 Hz or so. Active equalization obviously helped the output from the tiny satellites blend into a smooth whole; only a little bit of an upper-midbass "hole" was evident in my installation.

Pro Logic accuracy was pretty good: There was some "pumping" in the main and surround channels as the processor steered signals, and some moderate "ratcheting" of lateral pans, but both were audible only rarely with real-world use, and you'd really have to know what to listen for even to notice them. There was more dialogue leakage from the center to the main channels than is typical of today's better-grade DPL components, but it was never truly annoying, and the STV provided fine dialogue clarity and detail.

Channel-balance integrity was excellent; levels were maintained within a decibel or so over the entire master-volume range. And DPL-mode noise was good: There was a bit more than you get with the best discrete gear, but it was hardly troubling.

Tonal accuracy was natural, open, and reasonably airy. The STV satellites sounded a touch warm, or dry, to me; upping the processor/amp's treble by a click helped a little, as did tilting the main speakers down a tad, so they were aimed at ear level. The BOOST control delivered a subtle but useful extension of deep-bass weight; the penalties were a modest sacrifice in top loudness capability (before distortion set in) and a touch of extra midbass bloat.

As mentioned, you also get the CONCERT and THEATER surround modes, which are four-channel schemes that bypass the center channel. The former is meant for use with stereo programs that aren't Dolby-encoded, the latter for monaural programs. They proved variously useful and quite listenable; CONCERT was especially nice with classical music—though Lexicon, Yamaha, and other leaders in digital surround-sound synthesis need not look over their shoulders.

All in all, the STV's sound was first-rate given its Everyman design and modest cost (like the Sherwood, the 3M system has been advertised at $399 in New York City). It plays plenty loud for family viewing and was a snap to operate—though the remote's placement of its master-volume keys at the top seemed curious.

THE BOTTOM LINE

And the winner is . . . the home-theater shopper. Both of these examples of budget surround-sound systems are surprisingly good, though they surely aren't identical. Sherwood's HTS-100 gives you mucho bang-per-buck: You get a true A/V receiver with respectable multichannel power, integral audio/video switching, decent FM, multicomponent control, and a bit more ultimate system loudness. 3M's STV Digital 6 really isn't an A/V control center—it's a TV-sound surround system. But a clever hookup or the addition of an inexpensive switcher gives it much of the flexibility of the Sherwood. And though the STV delivers a bit less ultimate loudness than the HTS-100, I actually preferred the STV's sound quality.

Amortized over 2 or 3 years, either system would cost a whole lot less than the typical cable or DSS bill, and they both deliver bona-fide surround sound—a whole new world of audio depth, ambience, realism, and impact that remains a beguiling mystery for those who still rely on nothing but built-in TV audio. My only question: What could these guys do for *$799*? ■

One-box packaging and fairly clear instructions printed right on the carton are part of these systems' appeal.

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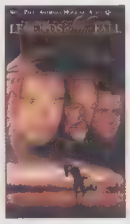

LEGENDS OF THE FALL
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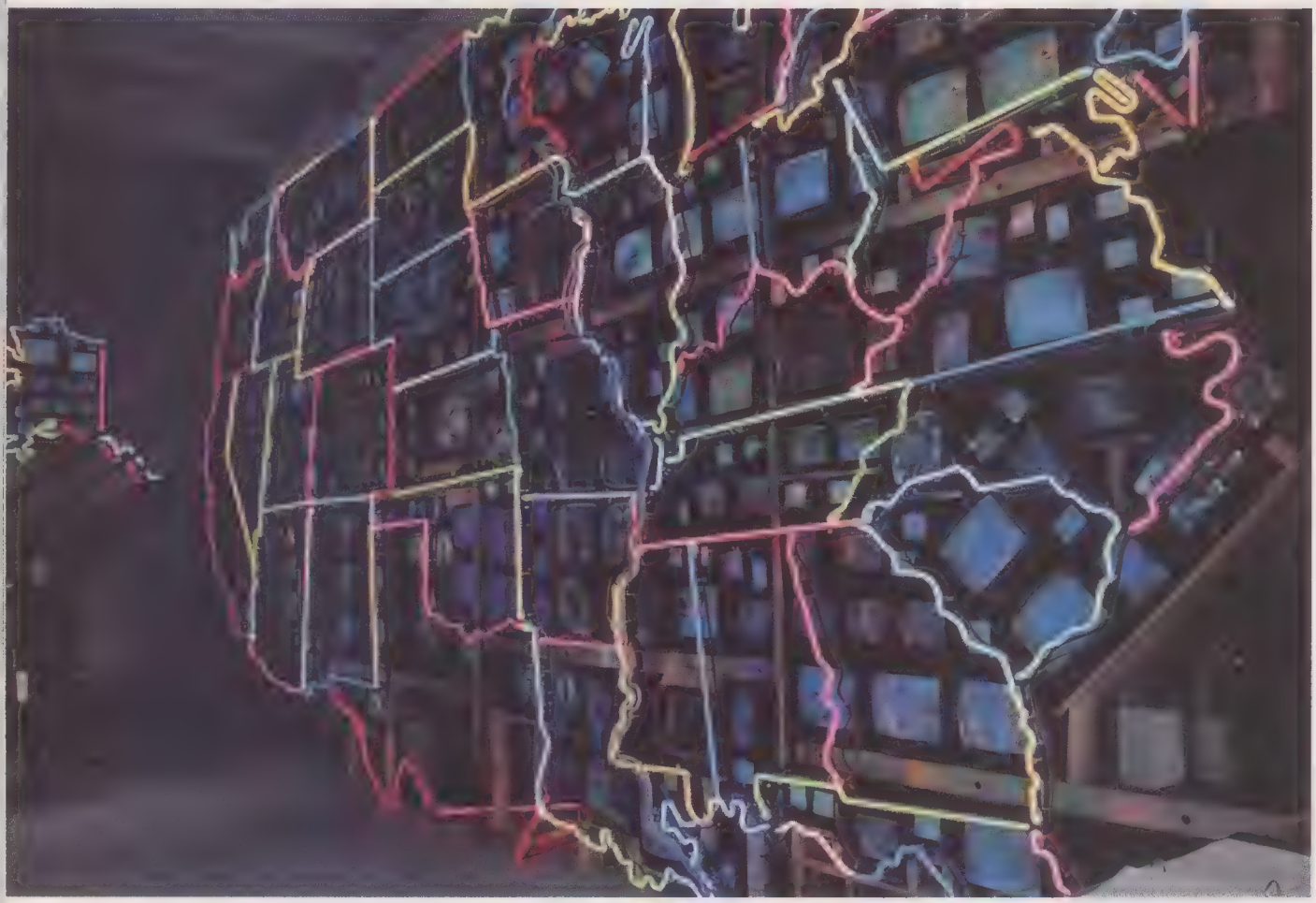
Wall of Sight

From home theater and video art to in-store hype, video walls are coming of age



PAIK'S PROGRESS *Electronic Superhighway* (1974–1995), a grand display by pioneering video artist Nam June Paik, dominated the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York City's Soho section last summer and fall. The video-and-neon sculpture stretches 25 feet in length, stands 15 feet tall, and includes 313 TVs of varying tube size. Three assistants drove across the United States to capture images for the VCR-driven TVs; Sony Hi8 camcorders were the captors. In the end, Paik expanded on these "found" scenes with familiar images from American history and popular culture. Each TV within a particular state's neon borders displays images germane to the state; Martin Luther King Jr. can be glimpsed amongst marchers on a set in Alabama, Johnny Carson delivers quips in Nebraska, and Dorothy skips along the Yellow Brick Road in Kansas. The Korean-born Paik dates 1974 as the genesis for his idea of an "information highway" (he claims he invented the term); he resurrected the concept only after hearing Vice President Gore talk up his vision of an electronic superhighway. Art, it seems, sometimes imitates sound bites.

IN TOUCH Custom-installed home-theater systems can offer the best of both worlds: thrilling performance without pillars of electronics and monolithic speakers crowding the room. Top-quality components may deliver the performance, but competent—some say inspired—professional installation will still be a necessity, or your home might end up with all the warmth of a cave. Electronics manufacturers are simplifying the process of selecting components by offering complete systems designed for custom in-wall installation. Philips and Thomson's RCA brand are leading the way, with system prices starting at about $5,000 (uninstalled). The system shown is an RCA Custom Home Theatre, which includes a rear-projection TV (screen sizes range from 46 to 80 inches), Dolby Pro Logic decoding, 280 watts of multichannel power amplification, a laserdisc player, a VHS Hi-Fi VCR, five speakers, and a subwoofer. Just don't lose the universal remote control.

COMMERCIAL KILL Just a few light-years beyond the 13-inch TV/VCRs superstores sometimes use to show infomercials about the latest rotisserie microwave or digital sneaker, video walls are becoming common fixtures in high-end retail establishments. The latest video wall comes from Toshiba's Multimedia Systems division (shown here in a Warner Bros. outlet); it uses a sophisticated microprocessor to manage nine 41-inch screens with image processing and a boat-load of special effects. Cartoon characters are extra. *—Bob St. Nice*

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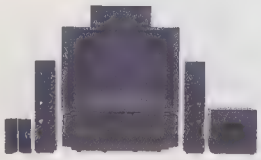

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Star Power

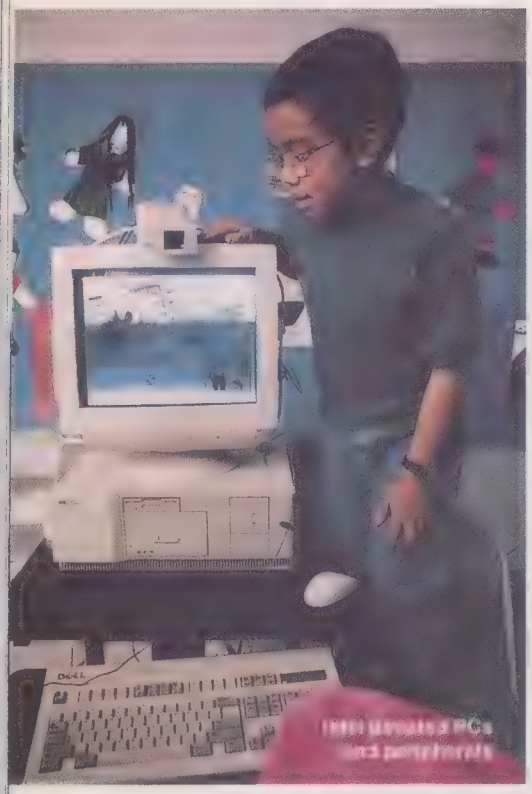
Starbright World enlivens the pediatric-healthcare experience

A videophone call unites friends

IN HER PRIVATE ROOM AT NEW YORK City's Mount Sinai Medical Center, 12-year-old Lauren peers intently into the colorful screen of a computer monitor, using a mouse to navigate the on-screen avatar representing her through a virtual space called the Build Your Own zone. Early in 1995, Lauren was diagnosed with a malignant tumor in her right wrist; 9 months of chemotherapy followed, and the radius bone in her right forearm was replaced with a metal rod. But today her mischievous brown eyes and smile light up the room as she plays. Finally tiring of the game, she clicks her way out and uses the computer to place a videophone call to one of her friends—another seriously ill child at Lucille Salter Packard Children's Hospital at California's Stanford University. "I've had bothersome moments," Lauren says after completing the call. "Like when I was in intensive care, and I wasn't allowed to do anything or see anyone. But this system lets me talk to kids from other hospitals who have the same thing I do. I realized I'm not alone, and that made me feel better."

By Chuck Tannert

The system that cheers Lauren and children like her is an interactive network called Starbright World, after its namesake, the not-for-profit Starbright Foundation. For some of the children, Starbright World helps speed their recovery; for those less fortunate, it helps to provide a measure of pleasure, com-



fort, diversion, and solace in their last months and weeks.

Starbright Foundation, which counts Steven Spielberg and General H. Norman Schwartzkopf among its supporters, is a collaborative effort between the worlds of technology, entertainment, and pediatric healthcare. Its mission is to develop products and programs that help children with cancer and other serious illnesses cope with their situation. Starbright World, a 3-D, multi-user virtual-reality playspace that links Mount Sinai with Children's Hospital of Boston, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, and Stanford's Lucille Salter Packard Children's Hospital, is their crowning achievement to date.

Children who are sequestered in hospitals for long periods of time feel cut off from the world, and that isolation breeds depression. The directors of the Starbright Foundation were determined to banish those feelings, and they decided that some form of interactive online network would break down the barriers of the hospitals' walls, allowing the children to communicate with one another and the world. But after taking stock of state-of-the-art online technology a year or so ago, Kris Garvey, the Foundation's managing director, wasn't sure their dream could be realized. "Everything we found was text-based," Garvey says. "When dealing with a pediatric population, text-only communication could exclude as much as 50 percent of the kids simply because they're too young or too ill to use a keyboard."

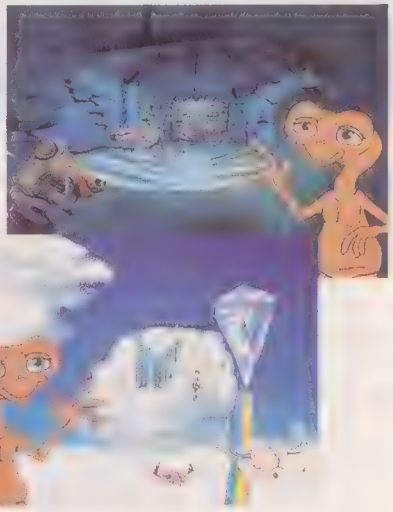
So the directors decided to raise the bar on technology and commission their own network, one that wouldn't be exclusive; the kids had to be able to choose between text-only, voice-only, and audio/video communication. Starbright Foundation's board of trustees, which is chaired by Spielberg, turned to corporate America for help in building this custom network. Intel, Sprint, UB Networks, and Worlds, Inc. answered the call.

Each corporate sponsor supplied a piece of the network's puzzle by utilizing their native strengths. UB Networks, a leader in the development of high-band interactive networking technologies (and the first corporate sponsor to sign up for Starbright World), provided the networking infrastructure through its Geo family of ATM (asynchronous transfer mode) and switching products. Telecommunications giant

Starbright lets kids escape from the trap caused by their illness or treatment.

Sprint constructed and maintains a broadband fiber-optic transmission network that links Starbright World's server to the participating hospitals. Intel provides the kids' hardware; each PC features a Pentium processor as well as ProShare videoconferencing hardware and software. And Worlds, Inc. [creator of the World Wide Web's AlphaWorld, page 19] built the virtual-reality playspace and the server technology required for simultaneous use by multiple children. The kids themselves participated in Starbright World's development, providing crucial input on how they'd actually use such a system.

The individual technologies already existed, but Starbright World offered an unprecedented opportunity for technology leaders to set aside their traditional competitive agendas and bring it all to-



Spielberg's E.T. in Tropical World, Cave World, and Sky World

gether. "The network we provided is the same one that Sprint customers use every day for video, audio, and data communications," says Robba Benjamin, president of Sprint Multimedia. "The difference is that for the first time we are putting it all together in real-time."

The network debuted last November in a gala event held at Mount Sinai Medical Center. Spielberg, General Schwartzkopf (who'd been recruited to chair Starbright's fundraising campaign and foundation board), and the four corporate sponsors hosted. Guests were treated to a fully interactive demonstration as a group of chronically ill children from Mount Sinai interacted with kids from the other participating hospitals. The kids walked the audience through all of Starbright World's virtual environments and demonstrated the network's communications capabilities.

After the demonstration, praise for the system was universal. "We've made tremendous technological advances in diagnosis and treatment," says Dr. John Rowe, MD, president and CEO of Mount Sinai Medical Center. "But we haven't used new technology to enhance the nonmedical aspects of our patients' lives in the hospital—until now. Through our creative partners and their genius, children can escape from the trap that's caused by their illness or treatment."

Spielberg, who's no stranger to pediatric wards, talked about reaching out and the healing process. "Shortly after I finished *E.T.*, I toured some hospitals and met a lot of seriously and chronically ill children," the director says. "They all expressed their desire to leave the hospital and go back to school, or play with their friends, or be with their brothers and sisters. They all wanted to go someplace their imagination would kick in again, where they wouldn't be afraid. Some even asked if E.T. could come to the hospital and use his magic finger to make them all better. This broke my heart. With Starbright World, we can extend that finger, and give these kids a place where they can be with their friends, make new friends, and a whole lot more."

Dr. Rowe confirms that Starbright World is not just fun but genuinely therapeutic. "We believe that Starbright World participation is going to enhance well-being, decrease the amount of medication participants need, hasten recovery, and shorten hospital stays," he says. "We expect to see very significant clinical effects."

Even the corporate sponsors, who were intimate with the technology, were surprised by what they'd wrought. Rob Schmults, marketing director for Worlds, Inc.'s consumer division, said he was blown away by the impact it had. "This was the first time I actually got to be with the kids as they were playing," he says. "It was just amazing. It really brought home how powerful this technology can be."

A work in progress. Starbright World has these kids excited about the future.

Starbright World doesn't exist in a vacuum, of course. Each institution has a Child Life Program, and the Starbright Project—the umbrella for the Starbright Foundation's in-hospital activities—is part of it. Child Life programs address the psychological and social issues seriously or chronically ill children confront when they require long-term hospitalization; the programs focus on all children, from infancy to adolescence, and are part of a daily regimen of healthcare. "Child Life specialists use a variety of creative arts and structures of play as therapeutic and educational interventions," says Diane Rode, director of Child Life at Mount Sinai. "Starbright World uses technology and technological processes as a therapeutic educational and socialization tool."

At Mount Sinai, the institution's pediatric patients have access to a full slate of Child Life activities, and that includes five PCs linked to Starbright World. The PCs are set up on standard carts, so children can use them in their rooms or in common rooms. The hardware itself isn't unusual: The computers are conventional Pentium-powered Dell PCs, each of which includes a monitor, a keyboard, a CPU with a built-in CD-ROM player, a mouse, and a pair of Lab Tech speakers; the camera and microphone provided with Intel's ProShare videoconferencing system are mounted on the monitor. The PCs run on *Windows 95*, and currently all inputting in the virtual playspace is done with a keyboard or mouse.

Diane Rode notes that Starbright Foundation is working on a more hospital-friendly—and stylish—housing for the hardware, called a PC Pal. And a large trackball and joystick are also being developed, as they've found that some kids can't operate a keyboard or mouse. The goal, as always, is to overcome physical limitations and ensure that all of the children can enjoy the wonder of Starbright World.

The virtual space of Starbright World includes four distinct areas: Tropical World, Sky World, Cave World, and the Build Your Own zone. In each of the Worlds, the perspective is always first-person—

children see the virtual environment just as they do the real world.

Tropical World is dominated by a tropical island lagoon complete with a cascading waterfall and palm trees. A rainbow flows skyward from a rock formation in the middle of the lagoon, doubling as a passage to Sky World; the desert surrounding the lagoon leads to Cave World. Tropical World's soundtrack, all ambient and three-dimensional, is *alive*, and does an expert job of capturing the feel of a real tropical island; birds trill incessantly over the sound of rushing water.

Traveling through the desert leads to the entrance to Cave World, an opening in the side of a sand dune. Pass through this gateway and you enter a labyrinthine world of caverns and tunnels studded with stalagmites and stalactites, a place both dark and gloomy—Lauren says it's cool to explore. Again, the soundtrack fleshes out the experience convincingly: Water drips from the rock faces into shallow pools below; echos give it all the unmistakable ambience of a cave.

In Sky World, a castle perches on fluffy white clouds flying in a blue sky; it looks like a scene out of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Though the castle is currently for aesthetics only, it will soon welcome exploration. The sound of rushing wind permeates Sky World; every so often, it changes direction and *howls*. Two cloud formations—a hurricane and tornado, both with icons churning within—immediately catch your eye. Approach the hurricane and you're drawn into an alternate space that will soon house an online videogame arcade; the tornado is the gateway to "the zone."

The Build Your Own zone is an infinite space in which virtually anything can be built; mountains and an active volcano serve as a backdrop for the children's creations. To build things, the children input codes from a standard list of shapes and characters. Once an item—a green three-eyed dragon, for example—has been added to the virtual landscape, the builder can manipulate it into any position.

The children are represented in the virtual spaces by animated characters called avatars. Soon the kids will be able to create their own avatars, but for now the characters are fixed; Mount Sinai's avatar is a car, Children's Hospital of Boston's is a pony, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh's is a fish, and Lucille Salter's is a helicopter. Worlds, Inc., which interacts with the kids in Starbright World to get a fix on how

SHOOTING STARS

Mount Sinai Medical Center uses video production as therapy

STARBRIGHT WORLD ISN'T THE FIRST example of video being used for therapy. The Child Life Program at New York City's Mount Sinai Medical Center has been using video production to help pediatric patients cope with their illnesses for nearly a decade.

Diane Rode, an art therapist and director of Mount Sinai's Child Life Program, began using video to help pediatric patients in the mid-'80s, when the first lightweight camcorders became available. Patients use them as a form of self-therapy, working individually or together in a workshop setting to document their experiences with chronic illness and the associated treatment. Patients assume the roles of producer, director, and actor, managing everything from pre-production through post-production. To date, Rode's Through Our Eyes Productions (TOEP) has created approximately 15 short videos, which are distributed to hospitals and other healthcare facilities across the United States.

The videos fall into two categories: "What-It's-Like" videos and documentaries. The former series consists of 10- to 15-minute programs that chronicle how an individual patient copes with specific medical procedures—getting an IV or taking insulin, for example. Documentaries are group productions that run about 30 minutes. "Workshop documentaries educate fellow patients, their families, and healthcare professionals about how chronically ill patients feel, what they think about, and what their strategies are for coping with the everyday stresses of having a specific illness," Rode says.

TOEP uses various VHS and Hi8 cams to capture raw video footage. Rode and Victoria Maldonado, a video-art specialist, walk the kids through the video production process shot-by-shot. Once they've taken all of the raw footage, Guy Puglisi, director of video services for Mount Sinai School of Medicine, makes a master edit copy. The kids are then given a time-coded VHS copy of the master.

Using that copy, the kids decide what sequences go where by creating a paper edit. Based on that paper edit, Puglisi does a preliminary online edit. "Following the children's instructions," he says, "we splice the scenes together and add music, effects, fades, and anything else they want. Before we do a final edit, a preliminary copy is sent to the kids for approval."

A donation from Sony helped to make Mount Sinai's fledgling Video-Services Department a well-equipped production and post-production facility. For final TOEP post-production work, Puglisi uses a Sony FXE-100 edit-controller as well as Sony 8mm, Hi8, VHS, and S-VHS decks. Effects are created using a Hitachi FP-1 graphics camera, an Amiga 2000/68040 with *Video Toaster 3.1* software, and a Chyron VP-2 character-generator. Final audio is mixed with a Sony MXP-290 mixer and an NEC CD-530 CD player. The final edit master is then recorded using a Sony PVW-2800 Betacam SP deck.

Eventually, Rode hopes to make TOEP's videos available on Starbright World through a video-on-demand service. That would enable kids to download the videos and learn about their ailments or treatments from their peers at their own pace. —*CT*

they use it, is represented by a bear. At the system's debut, General Schwartzkopf was represented by a three-star bear and Spielberg's avatar was E.T.

When Lauren wants to communicate with a friend within Starbright World, the first thing she does is seek out the avatar representing their hospital by moving Mount Sinai's car around one of the virtual areas. Once she's found the avatar she's looking for, she uses the mouse to click on it. Then she selects whether she'll communicate via text, audio, or audio/video by clicking on one of three icons that appear at the right edge of the screen.

A monkey that's lounging on its back with a cartoon bubble containing the letters A, B, and C coming out of its mouth serves as the text icon. In this mode, Lauren can type messages to an unlimited number of her friends. The audio icon looks like a phone, and establishes a two-way phone call. In both of these modes, the children's perspective remains in Starbright World, enabling them to physically interact while they communicate in the real world.

A camcorder icon accesses the audio/video mode. When Lauren clicks on it, she's whisked out of the virtual space, and the on-screen image of Tropical World, Sky World, Cave World, or the Build Your Own zone is replaced with video images of her and the friend she's called.

As impressive as Starbright World is today, it's really still in its infancy; other hospitals plan to go online, and health-care professionals, child-life and education specialists, and the kids themselves are working with the corporate sponsors to develop new kinds of "socialization software." One idea they're considering is a Virtual Drive-In Theater, a place where the children can gather and view new movies or request video-on-demand [see "Shooting Stars," page 36]. "What it really comes down to is that we're building a stage on which the kids will actually act out a play," Worlds, Inc.'s Rick Schmults says. "So it's critical the kids have input on what the stage looks like and what kind of functionality it has."

If Starbright World's visuals don't quite measure up to the best of today's PC software, the kids don't seem to mind; all you have to do is watch Lauren's face light up when one of her friends appears on-screen. The system delivers on its promise to let seriously ill kids play and interact with one another regardless of their physical limitations. For a short time every day, these children can leave the debilitating world of medicine and therapy behind and simply be kids again.

STARBRIGHT FOUNDATION'S KRIS GARVEY reports that the Build Your Own zone gets the best reviews from the kids. "The pediatric population ranges from toddlers through teenagers," she says. "So you can't make everything all cute and cuddly or make everything too hip. The zone lets kids use their imaginations to create whatever *they* feel like. We provided the tools; they're responsible for putting something together."

The kids' imaginations seem up to the task. At Mount Sinai, the kids figured out that an avatar moves faster in the Build Your Own zone than in the Worlds, since the zone doesn't include the kind of visuals that sap the system's computer memory. So they built a race track, and now they hold races with kids from other hospitals. During Starbright World's debut last November, one of the kids even challenged General Schwartzkopf to a race. The general lost. ■

SMOKE SIGNALS

The American Cancer Society rolls out TV commercials

AS NATIONAL ATTENTION IS BEING REfocused on the dangers of cigarette smoking and on the methods the tobacco industry has employed in developing and marketing their products, the American Cancer Society (ACS) has moved from airing simple public-service announcements to the high-profile world of paid TV advertising. Two 1-minute spots, *Younger and Younger* (at right) and *Right Hand, Left Hand*, were created to bolster support among legislators for the stricter regulations on tobacco advertising proposed by the FDA. The spots, which have been airing on CNN's *Larry King Live* and *Crossfire* since last fall, dramatize the extent to which tobacco advertising influences children under the age of 18.

Both spots and the CNN airtime were privately funded by supporters of the FDA regulations, says Joann Schellenbach, director of media relations for the ACS. Because the window of opportunity for supporting the FDA's proposals was closing quickly, Schellenbach says the ACS decided that TV was the only way to go. "We had to target our message clearly and deliver it to the right audience," she says. "The best way to do this was through paid TV advertising. With public-service time, you only get it when you get it."

Larry King Live and *Crossfire* were chosen because of their audience profiles. "A lot of key decision-makers watch these shows," says Elizabeth Bridgers, national communications director for the ACS. "Our resources are limited, so we had to broadcast to the people who'd make the greatest impact on the issue."

Public reaction to the spots has been very positive. The ACS planned to run them until the commentary period for the regulations concluded. —*CT*

Star Deck

RCA's VR678HF Hi-Fi VCR controls a DSS receiver

TEST 830

OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS, TWO THINGS HAPPENED THAT changed the way my family and I enjoy our electronic entertainment. First, after discovering that the local cable company absolutely refused to wire our rural vacation home, we bought an RCA DSS system. (We love it.) And second, I spent several weeks testing and comparing 10 Hi-Fi VCRs for VIDEO ["Tale of the Tape," November 1995], several of which were capable of controlling a cable box for time-shift recording. This confluence of events put me in the perfect frame of mind to welcome RCA's VR678HF, an affordable VHS Hi-Fi VCR that's capable of controlling a DSS receiver from RCA, GE, or ProScan. To top it off, this VCR performs well across the board and even includes an innovative feature that's designed to automatically skip over recorded commercials.

The 678 ($499) manages to appear both boxy and sleek; the display's curved lens sticks out a bit from the front, giving the VCR a slightly architectural look. It has a jet-black finish with a very attractive fluorescent display that's done up in amber. (It doesn't quite blend with RCA's dark-gray DSS receiver, however.)

The VCR's front panel isn't cluttered at all, with just six buttons, including separate stop and eject buttons. This user-friendliness is consistent throughout: Turn on the VCR and the display greets you with, "Hello." Turn it off and it reads, "Bye." In use, the display normally shows clock time, but you can switch it to indicate elapsed-tape time. An on-screen menu lets you choose between a dim or bright display or automatic dimming when power is off. A shuttle knob is located on the right (there's no jog dial). A flip-down panel on the left reveals a set of A/V input jacks and buttons for input and TV/VCR selection, tracking control, and channel-changing.

Other high-profile features include cable-box control (when DSS isn't on tap), VCR Plus+ programming, auto clock-setting via EDS/XDS signals, a universal remote control, and the ability to record at SP, LP, or SLP speed. The 678 also deserves praise for letting you change speeds while a recording is in progress—handy if you suddenly discover that you're running out of tape (which the trusty display of elapsed-tape time can tell you).

If you want the VCR to control a cable box or an RCA, ProScan, or GE DSS receiver, the box or receiver has to sit on top of the VCR; an infrared window on the right of the VCR's top panel emits control signals. Unlike some VCRs that control cable boxes, the 678 doesn't come with a wired "wand" that controls components arrayed differently (nor is one an option). Control of Sony DSS systems or future systems from other manufacturers isn't possible, which is a shame.

The 45-button remote is colorful, with feet at the top and bottom that give it a barbell-like appearance. Though it looks inviting, it's actually rather complex—capable of controlling five different devices (TV, cable or DSS, two VCRs, and an RCA-brand audio component) and sporting not one

BY CLIFF ROTH

but two cursor-based control pads. The owner's manual lists 66 brands of TVs and 30 brands of cable boxes it can control, but it can only control RCA- and GE-brand VCRs, LD players, and auxiliary gear.

Fortunately, the 678 uses the same cable-box code numbers for the universal remote as for the VCR's automated cable-box timer control, thus avoiding a confusing pitfall that plagues many other VCRs; two separate setup procedures are still required, however. Setup is easier for DSS than for anything else, since the remote is preprogrammed to control a Thomson-brand DSS receiver—just turn it on and you'll be ready to go.

Getting the 678 in sync with DSS or cable is a reasonably simple affair. Press the MENU/PROGRAM button and a series of on-screen prompts asks you how you want to configure your system. From there it's just a matter of selecting options. The setup procedure also gets points for letting you skip tedious steps, such as scanning for available channels (a process that can take half an hour because DSS programming is spread over channels 100 through 900), programming VCR Plus+ channels, and setting the clock.

It's worth repeating that the 678 is capable of controlling and handling time-shifting functions for either a DSS system *or* a cable box; it can't do both simultaneously. If you currently receive basic unscrambled cable signals (in other words, if your cable system doesn't use a set-top cable box), you can toggle and time-shift between DSS and cable *or* DSS and over-the-air broadcasting. But if you're currently receiving scrambled cable signals and use a set-top box, you can only control cable or DSS via the 678. (Thomson says that some of next year's RCA-brand VCRs will feature the ability to control and time-shift a cable box and a DSS system simultaneously.)

On the subject of clock-setting, know that the 678 can't do this automatically if DSS is its only source. That's because auto clock-setting is managed by EDS/XDS signals, and they're only transmitted as part of the vertical blanking interval (VBI) you get with an over-the-air or cable PBS station. You will get auto clock-setting, therefore, if an antenna, unscrambled cable feed, or cable box is plugged into the 678—whether you're using a DSS system or not. The odd part is that a DSS receiver always knows what time it is, since time info is part of the standard DSS bit-stream. Don't despair if you're only using DSS: Manual clock-setting is easy. Either way, an option automatically adjusts the clock twice a year for Daylight Savings Time.

To test out the 678's DSS-control capabilities, I set up the VCR with DSS channel numbers, manually programmed the VCR's timer (I have no trouble with manual programming routines and really dislike the VCR Plus+ setup drill), loaded a tape into the VCR, and turned it off; the word TIMER appeared reassuringly in the display. I was pleased to discover that you really don't need to shut off the DSS receiver for the timer system to work, even though that's what the owner's manual tells you to do. (We leave the receiver on all the time in our house, the way people always leave their cable boxes on.) When the time came for my time-shift instructions to be followed, the 678 first turned the DSS box off and then, intelligently sensing what was up, turned it back on again. And the show I wanted taped was recorded without incident. I found that I could even program the 678 to record pay-per-view movies—as long as I manually purchased the films in advance.

Anyone who has DSS and uses a rooftop antenna or basic unscrambled cable to receive local stations will appreciate that the timer works with both signals. DSS channels start at 100, so channel numbers below 100 are tuned through basic cable or an over-the-air antenna, and those above 100 are received with the dish.

As mentioned, the 678's DSS-control capabilities aren't the only story here. RCA calls their commercial-killing feature Commercial>>Advance, and it works with all recordings—including timer, one-touch, and manual recordings from antenna, cable, or DSS sources. It kicks in as soon as the recording process ends—providing that the timer isn't set to immediately record another program and that the recording in question lasted at least 15 minutes. When multiple programs have been queued for recording, the VCR waits until all of the programs are recorded, then goes back and activates the Commercial>>Advance function.

Technically, this feature (which RCA cryptically calls CF in the setup menu) doesn't edit out commercials. Rather, it analyzes the tape after the recording

BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger–Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: 240 lines
Picture S/N: unweighted video, 45.7 dB (SP), 45.5 dB (LP), 41.5 dB (SLP); weighted video, 47.9 dB (SP), 49.1 dB (LP), 48 dB (SLP); chroma AM, 48.8 dB (SP), 46.8 dB (LP), 44.6 dB (SLP); chroma PM, 46.3 dB (SP), 45.3 dB (LP), 41.3 dB (SLP)
Audio frequency response: Hi-Fi, 20–20,000 Hz +0.08, –2.8 dB; linear, 140–11,000 Hz (SP), 140–6,000 Hz (LP), 140–4,000 Hz (SLP)
Audio dynamic range: 74.5 dB

THE SHORT FORM

RCA VR678HF

Component type: VHS Hi-Fi VCR
Price: $499
Target: Thomson-brand DSS owners and home-theater enthusiasts
Minimum requirements*: Thomson-brand DSS system, 27-inch TV, A/V receiver, main, center, and surround speakers

KEY FEATURES

■ Thomson-brand DSS or cable-box control ■ Commercial>>Advance commercial-skipping ■ VCR Plus+ ■ Automatic clock-setting ■ Records at all three tape speeds ■ On-screen displays ■ Front-panel A/V inputs ■ Display of elapsed-tape time ■ 45-key universal remote control

SUMMARY

■ Commercial>>Advance is a great feature that's very easy to use ■ DSS control worked well ■ Can control either DSS or cable box, but not both simultaneously ■ Picture quality was good to very good at SP speed ■ RCA's most innovative VCR features at a nice price ■ Pioneers new turf

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has been completed, examines it for the fast-changing picture characteristics of commercials and marks the points where it thinks commercials begin and end; during this process, the words COMM MARK appear in the display. In practice, the process took about 3 minutes for a half-hour program. When you play the tape back, the VCR automatically notes its commercial-index marks and fast-searches past the section of tape they bracket. During the search process, the screen goes blue—unless you elect, via one of the on-screen menus, to see the search process. (That was my choice, so I could evaluate what was being skipped.)

To test out the commercial-killer, I first taped a Nickelodeon cartoon program called *Doug*. I was absolutely amazed when the commercial-killer kicked in, just after the network's ID ended and a string of commercials began—it zipped right through them. Unfortunately, it also skipped through *Doug*'s prologue and opening credits, though it did ramp down into PLAY mode at the beginning of the program proper. The show had only one commercial break in the middle, and the 678 navigated it perfectly.

Later, I tested the commercial-killer with a wide variety of programs. It worked really well in most cases. For the acid test, I recorded some MTV, reasoning that fast-cutting music videos might mimic the patterns of TV commercials more closely than other types of programs. I'm pleased to report that the 678 was not fooled.

Finally, in a fit of existentialist whimsy, I recorded a Carleton Sheets real-estate infomercial. Alas, the VCR didn't skip anything. Not as intelligent as we humans, the 678 is looking for certain patterns of electronic information to determine what is and isn't a commercial, and has no inside information about the underlying intent. (If it did, where would it draw the line—product placements, cross-marketing, celebrity plugs on talk/variety shows? The mind boggles.)

Besides cutting out *Doug*'s opening, the only other slips occurred when an individual commercial lasted 2 minutes. The VCR was zipping along during one commercial stretch on Country Music Television when it slowed down and started playing Time–Life's 2-minute "Treasures of Christmas" spot; ditto for 2-minute AT&T and NordicTrack commercials. With *Saturday Night Live*, the 678 never mistook a joke commercial (part of the program) for the real thing.

I also attempted to "fool" the VCR into erroneously marking a previously recorded tape by adding a very short recording at the end and hoping it would go back and mark the entire tape. But the VCR knew the point to go back to (the point where the new recording began), making such "post striping" impossible and once again foiling any attempts at petty chicanery.

Whenever a recording ends, a menu pops up on-screen, indicating that the marking process will begin in 30 seconds unless you choose to begin it immediately, cancel the operation, or want it to do the marking later. The first and last 2 minutes of recordings don't get marked no matter what.

The system is particularly effective when you make recordings at SLP speed; a typical 3-minute cluster of commercials takes just about 10 seconds to skip at this speed. All in all, Commercial>>Advance is a great feature, and it's very easy to use. As an admittedly wacky aside, I wouldn't mind seeing its opposite: a feature that skipped the programs so you could just watch the commercials—it'd be perfect for my annual Super Bowl recordings.

You'll also be happy to hear that the 678 isn't a nice-house/no-furniture deal. At SP speed, picture quality was good to very good for the VHS format. At SLP, the picture was a bit on the noisy and jittery side, but it was still acceptable. Resolution was about average for the format at both speeds, as was color accuracy. Still frames and slow-motion playback looked good at SP speed, with just a slight bit of jitter; the jitter problem became severe at SLP. Hi-Fi audio was in the good to very-good range, though linear audio was a bit noisy (not a big deal, really).

I'LL JUST COME OUT AND SAY IT: I LIKE the VR678HF a lot. One of the best parts is that RCA has included their most innovative features in a model that many people can actually afford to buy. Not that I wouldn't like to see an S-VHS model with these features. . . . If you already own a Thomson-brand DSS dish, or are thinking of getting one, this is the VCR to get. Even if DSS isn't a part of your present or future, the 678's commercial-kill feature is tough to overlook. RCA has truly pioneered some new turf here. ■

Top Gun

Harman Kardon's Citation 7.0 is a consummate home-theater preamp/surround-sound processor

TEST 831

YOU ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR FIRST TIME. FOR ME, IT happened at the tender age of 13, and my life was changed forever. I refer, of course, to my initial encounter with a high-end audio system. So dramatic was the impression it made that I could never listen to mass-market systems the same way again. And despite my unbridled enthusiasm for home theater, the genre has rarely provoked an equivalent sense of discovery. All that changed when I installed Harman Kardon's Citation 7.0 A/V preamplifier/surround-sound processor in my home theater. To put it simply, the 7.0 ($3,550) leaves every surround decoder I've heard in the dust.

Audio veterans will recognize the Citation designation, which Harman International first debuted over 30 years ago when the company was still known simply as Harman Kardon. Citation components always represented the best fruits of HK's labor, and that hasn't changed. The revered Citation name has now been bestowed on the HI division formerly known as Fosgate–Audionics, the switch coinciding with the introduction of a revamped product line. The new Citation offers a full range of upmarket home-theater essentials, including processors, power amplifiers, and speakers. If the 7.0 is any indication, these latest offerings will honor the Citation nameplate.

At a substantial 5.25 x 17.5 x 14.5 inches (h/w/d), the 7.0 is a truly beautiful component. Its sculpted black-anodized aluminum faceplate is embellished with flush-mounted pushbuttons for the most basic controls (power, source selection, surround mode, mute and volume), relegating access to the bulk of the processor's numerous functions to the illuminated remote control. The comprehensive front-panel display features an alphanumeric readout of source, surround-mode, and volume settings as well as illuminated indicators for many functions. Stereo input-level meters are included, as is a circular six-segment steering-logic indicator that visually confirms where the 7.0 is directing signals. Display brightness can be adjusted via the OPTIONS menu or turned off entirely using the remote's PANEL DIM button.

HK's designers have provided enough inputs and outputs to satisfy the most ambitious home-theater builder. The 7.0 can accommodate eight audio/video sources with a brace of four S-Video inputs supplementing the eight composite video inputs. Four composite-video and an equal number of S-Video outputs can route signals to a total of four monitors and/or recording devices. In addition to the requisite outputs for left, center, right, and rear channels, the 7.0 includes connections for side surrounds, one or two subwoofers, and two audio-only recorders. All audio and composite-video jacks are gold-plated.

A close examination of the back panel reveals a number of unusual facilities. Three "trigger" jacks allow the 7.0 to control external devices such as lights, curtains, movie screens, and Citation power amps. Decorators and installers will applaud the inclusion of the IR IN socket, which allows an exter-

BY ANTHONY CHIARELLA

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nal infrared sensor to relay commands from the remote control when the equipment is hidden from view. An input for the supplied microphone supports the automatic channel-balancing sequence, while an RS-485 port allows the 7.0 to interface with future Citation products, such as the upcoming 7.5 DP, a multichannel digital processor that'll decode Dolby Surround AC-3 and DTS six-channel digital surround-sound information.

Even without AC-3 (and DTS) onboard, the 7.0 is loaded when it comes to surround sound. Along with Dolby Pro Logic and THX's enhancement of Pro Logic, the preamp/processor incorporates two additional modes designed by surround-sound stalwart Jim Fosgate. Based upon Pro Logic, the 70 MM mode blends main-channel information into the corresponding surround channels and extends their high-frequency response to 12,000 Hz (recall that the surround channels are limited to 7,000 Hz in the Dolby Pro Logic and THX schemes); the mode's goal is to increase the listener's perception of space and ambience.

The SIX-AXIS mode works with six channels (recall that Dolby Pro Logic and THX's enhancement of it work with four). A true stereo feed runs to the surround speakers, creating a sixth "phantom" channel, or axis, at the center rear of the room. Equally suitable for movies or music, SIX-AXIS bestows the same kind of benefits you get with AC-3 on the universe of existing (non-AC-3) video and audio software.

Decoders traditionally synthesize surround information from two-channel soundtracks and music recordings through the use of digital signal processing. Also known as DSP, this technique has often been criticized by audiophiles for producing harsh or unnatural sound. In the 7.0, DSP is only used to generate rear-channel delay signals and timing relationships—the front channels remain purely analog. As a result, the Citation also functions as a state-of-the-art audio preamplifier, and adds ROCK, JAZZ, CLASSICAL, and ENHANCED MONO surround modes to the four cinema modes previously described.

Want more? Each of the eight surround modes is defined by a variety of acoustical parameters, including front, rear, and side stage width, rear-channel delay, hall size, and equalization. And the 7.0 lets the user adjust the factory settings of these parameters, thereby personalizing spatial effects to suit the room, the system's other components, and/or personal taste. Four "custom" keys on the remote allow these preferences to be stored and recalled.

The 7.0's 46-button remote allows enormous latitude in adjustment, letting the enthusiast control every con-

THE SHORT FORM

HARMAN KARDON CITATION 7.0

Component type: A/V preamplifier/surround-sound processor
Price: $3,550
Target: Audio/videophiles
Minimum requirements*: 32-inch TV, Hi-Fi VCR, main, center, and surround speakers

KEY FEATURES

■ Dolby Pro Logic and THX decoding ■ SIX-AXIS surround mode ■ 70MM surround mode ■ Four DSP cinema and four DSP audio surround modes ■ Adjustable surround-sound parameters ■ Four presets for custom surround-sound modes ■ Re-equalization filter ■ Defeatable sibilance filter ■ Auto channel-balancing (microphone supplied) ■ Eight A/V inputs, including four S-Video ■ Four composite video outputs, 4 S-Video outputs ■ Two-channel bypass mode ■ Three "trigger" jacks ■ IR IN socket ■ Input for future Citation component ■ Illuminated remote control

SUMMARY

■ A truly beautiful component ■ A wealth of A/V inputs and outputs ■ Steep learning curve ■ Earns high marks for its preamplifier ■ Logic steering and dynamics were impressive ■ Never sounded bright or fatiguing ■ SIX-AXIS was incredibly satisfying ■ An unreservedly topnotch A/V preamp/processor

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BY THE NUMBERS
Measurements by Berger–Braithwaite Labs

Insertion loss: –0.4 dB
Picture S/N: unweighted luminance, 61 dB; weighted luminance, 62.1 dB; unweighted video, 60.3 dB; weighted video, 63.6 dB; chroma AM, 73 dB; chroma PM, 62.4 dB

ceivable performance parameter without leaving the listening position. A series of on-screen menus provides visual acknowledgement of user input, guiding the hobbyist through the maze of setup facilities.

Other features include a two-channel stereo mode that bypasses the surround processor. PANORAMA can be used to expand the soundstage. There's a sibilance filter that reduces sizzle from dialogue. HIGH EQ dials in a re-equalization circuit similar to THX's when the THX surround mode isn't being used. And center-channel level can be boosted independently by up to 4 dB.

Hookup was both straightforward and simple. Audio and video signals from each source component are connected to one of the eight sets of inputs; audio outputs run to amplification. Though I normally balance audio channels with the help of my trusty Radio Shack sound-level meter, recall that the 7.0 includes an automatic calibration function. I found that manual channel levels set by the auto routine were within 1 decibel of my manual settings. Nice.

Don't think the 7.0 limits user input to changes of sonic consequence. Each source and custom surround mode can be renamed to suit your fancy. Turn-on volume may be adjusted and programmed. Even the color of the screens behind the menus can be changed! If all of this control flexibility sounds daunting, it is. Though the on-screen instructions are a model of clarity, mastery of the Citation's abundant options initially requires time, diligence, and referral to the 125-page owner's manual. Rest assured, however, that the effort is worthwhile.

Judged solely as a stereo preamplifier, the 7.0 would earn high marks—even from audiophiles. I evaluated it in my audio-only system, and found its sound quality competitive with several well regarded, though less expensive, high-end models. In terms of surround-sound performance, the 7.0 simply has no equal to my ears. Laserdiscs I've auditioned hundreds of times yielded subtle details I'd never heard before—the day the 7.0 arrived, in fact, I stayed up until 5 a.m., rediscovering my favorite films.

Logic steering was fast and precise, providing a seamless transition across the front soundstage. As a result, car chases and special effects were conveyed with a heightened sense of realism. I was also impressed with the 7.0's way with dynamics, as the broad volume swings of explosions and car crashes were reproduced without a hint of compression.

In marked contrast to most surround-sound processors I've heard, the 7.0 never sounded bright or fatiguing. And while Fosgate's discrete circuitry deserves much of the credit, the HIGH EQ circuit certainly contributed to the natural treble presentation when THX wasn't in use.

Though the 7.0 delivered an excellent surround experience in each movie mode, I found SIX-AXIS to be the most fully satisfying. The goal of surround sound, after all, is to place the viewer in the center of the action, and SIX-AXIS accomplishes this feat better than any home or professional processor I've heard. Descriptions such as "enveloping" or "involving" just don't do it justice. Rear-channel information is more completely articulated and has greater continuity with front-channel output. You really have to hear it to believe it.

One of the tenets of high-end audio is that the equipment should never call attention to itself. The hardware should fade into the background and put the listener in touch with the performance. Prior to my time with the 7.0, I've always been aware of the hardware's impact on home-theater sound. Now, for the first time, I know that it can offer the same level of transparency as the best high-end audio systems.

IS HARMAN KARDON'S CITATION 7.0 PERFECT? Probably not. But when I compare its performance to that of its peers, I find it difficult to fault. It offers an excellent preamplifier, plenty of connections, lots of intelligent features, a door to a digital-surround upgrade, THX surround decoding, an independent re-equalization circuit, and the unparalleled SIX-AXIS surround mode. It's not inexpensive, but it's still a fantastic bargain. If you're looking for the best home-theater experience money can buy, you haven't covered the bases until you audition the 7.0. ■

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Groove Tube

Panasonic's CT-31SF31 31-inch TV lands you in super-tube territory

TEST 832

THE NUMBER OF LARGE DIRECT-VIEW TVS IS POSITIVELY staggering, encompassing sets with screens measuring 31, 32, 34, 35, or 40 inches. The major manufacturers, naturally, contribute most of the models, often with several grades of tubes and associated electronics within the screen-size categories they choose to populate. In addition, each grade of video parts—good, better, and best—within a single screen-size category may be teamed with one of several packages of convenience and audio features. Panasonic is certainly a major manufacturer, and their CT-31SF31 is one of the company's dozen or so 31-inchers, which range from $900 to $2,400. The 31SF31 ($1,700) uses the company's best picture tube for this screen size, but is otherwise minimalist in its approach. Major audio features aren't offered because the set is designed for someone who already has or wants to get a separate surround-sound system. Likewise, a multitude of connections isn't required because that system offers (or will offer) them. The idea with this set, in a nutshell, is all performance and no frills.

The 31SF31 is fairly sleek but no lightweight, measuring 26 x 32 x 21 inches (h/w/d) and weighing in at 150 pounds. The picture tube is Panasonic's well regarded PanaBlack SuperFlat GAOO, which employs natural phosphors. The back panel offers two A/V inputs (one with an S-Video jack), one audio output, and one antenna input. There are no A/V inputs on the front panel.

Perhaps we should change no-frills to low-frills: High-profile features include dual-tuner PIP, channel lock, a timer, a favorite-channel function, a synthesized surround-sound mode for use with stereo programs, three color-temperature choices, and video noise reduction. PIP features include two window sizes, four window positions, freeze and swap options, and a search mode that scans each tunable channel or only those you've designated as favorites. The timer can be set to power down the set in 30, 60, or 90 minutes or at a preset time; it can also turn on the set and tune a specific channel at a preset time. The lock feature has three options: ALL, which denies access to all of the channels and inputs, CHANNEL, which lets you lock up to four channels, and GAME, which locks channels 3 and 4 as well as the video inputs.

The 31SF31 also offers Panasonic's Artificial Intelligence picture and sound circuits, which can be switched on or off. AI PICTURE is said to provide fleshtone correction, optimum fleshtone brightness, color edge correction, and color noise reduction. AI SOUND is said to enhance sound quality via auto-

BY PETER BARRY

matic adjustment of bass and treble as well as regulate volume levels between programs and commercials (similar to Magnavox's Smart Sound feature), with the goal of maintaining a constant output level. When AI SOUND is active, the set's basic bass and treble controls can't be adjusted.

The remote control is universal and programmable. It can be used to control VCRs, cable boxes, and laserdisc players. I found it to be fairly well laid out; the concave disc that's provided for volume and channel changes as well as basic menu navigation is an easy find for the thumb.

Operation is straightforward. The remote's ACTION button brings up the main menu, which lets you choose among options like basic setup, picture and audio modes, and the PIP modes; as mentioned, moving about within this menu and its submenus is accomplished via the control disc. One slight annoyance: The 31SF31's menu system doesn't disappear from the screen unless you actively step out of it. A bonus: Adjustments to the picture parameters are easily made and remembered because settings are indicated numerically (0 to 63) as well as via simple graphics.

Out-of-the-box performance indicated good clarity, serious brightness, some video noise, and good detail; images were crisp and colorful. The three color-temperature choices, accessible via the picture menu's WHITE submenu, include COOL (very bright and blue), STD (standard; very bright, but less blue), and WARM (reddish, but less so than similar settings on many other sets). Overall, the image looked nice.

Test patterns from the *A Video Standard* laserdisc showed that the image had a good shape and wasn't objectionably overscanned. A blip on the vertical crosshatch lines indicated some ringing in the power supply. I saw more dot crawl than I expected, considering the 31SF31's résumé. Good detail up into the higher video frequencies was clearly evident. Colors were oversaturated. Gray scale was good.

The color-temperature choices all measured high, ranging from 9,300 to 15,100° K, though STD was admirably consistent from high to low output. Light output in each mode was extremely high. [Color-temperature and output specifics are listed in the "By the Numbers" box.]

STD's top-to-bottom consistency made it a natural foundation on which to make adjustments. My first step was to turn off AI PICTURE and the video noise-reduction circuit. I found that every parameter within STD was set at its midpoint except for CONTRAST, which was max'd (63 on the numerical scale). I lowered CONTRAST to 44, which delivered an appropriate 29.9 ftL. BRIGHTNESS stayed at 32. SHARPNESS was brought all the way down to 1. TINT was bumped up to 44, and COLOR settled in at 31. Note that one or two clicks to the TINT or COLOR picture parameters could make huge changes in color saturation.

Color rendition now looked quite good. Perhaps Panasonic's natural color phosphors were coming into play; I'd rate the decoder as good. At this point, viewing was a very satisfying experience. Even though STD's high color temperature did give the image a bluish cast, detail was excellent in both dark areas and daylight scenes. Edges were sharp, and fleshtones were very natural. The image was rich, bright, and vibrant. Professional calibration to the D6500º standard proved simple and effective; after calibration, the gray scale was extremely linear.

Switching AI PICTURE on and off with various images on-screen showed that this mode boosts CONTRAST to the max; in practice, this minimizes whatever effects the other circuitry might have. If you plan to use this mode, adjust picture parameters with it switched on because it works from the launchpad of their settings.

Listening evaluations revealed that AI SOUND gave soundtracks a cavernous quality (sometimes good, sometimes not). The volume-limiter acted on volume peaks within programs as well as on changes between programs and commercials; loud sounds in films (explosions, for example) were therefore leveled, and had less impact because of it. The limiting action actually helped the onboard speaker system, which didn't handle loud volume settings well; recall, however, that this set really is designed to be used with a separate surround-sound system.

IN THE CT-31SF31, PANASONIC OFFERS their best 31-inch picture tube at a relatively affordable price. Though it's positioned as a no-frills set, it actually includes a few nice touches in that area. The image it delivers looks good before calibration, and after calibration it looked very good. In sum, the 31SF31 is a strong contender in its size/price class. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger–Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: >500 lines
Picture S/N: video, 52.7 dB; chroma AM, 62.5 dB; chroma PM, 62.1 dB
Color temperature (before calibration): COOL, 15,100° K high, 11,900° K low; STD, 11,900° K high and low; WARM, 9,300° K high, 10,900° K low
Color temperature (after calibration): STD, 6,430° K high, 6,490° K low
Screen brightness: STD, 63 ftL before adjustment, 29.9 ftL after adjustment

THE SHORT FORM

PANASONIC CT-31SF31

Component type: 31-inch TV set
Price: $1,700
Target: Videophiles, movie buffs, and serious home-theater enthusiasts
Minimum requirements*: Hi-Fi VCR, A/V receiver, main, center, and surround speakers

KEY FEATURES

■ 31-inch PanaBlack SuperFlat GAOO picture tube ■ Advanced dual-tuner PIP ■ Artificial Intelligence picture and sound modes ■ Two A/V inputs ■ One S-Video input ■ Advanced channel-lock features ■ Three color-temperature settings ■ Universal remote control

SUMMARY

■ Panasonic's best picture tube in a low-frills model ■ Designed for use with an external sound system ■ Picture was rich, bright, and vibrant ■ Color-temperature settings and Artificial Intelligence offer many setup options ■ Calibrates very well ■ Will do a fine job in a home-theater system

Circle 116 on reader service card

*To maximize its potential

Action 'Pack

Canton's Plus MoviePack Active

TEST 833

LIKE A MICRO-BREWERY TWEAKING THE FORMULA OF A new amber lager, speaker manufacturers continue to refine the multispeaker packages they proffer for home-theater use. They realize that asking people to put five or six speaker boxes in their living rooms is asking a lot, so most of them have at least one system that tries to simplify the process. Canton, a German manufacturer, makes speakers of all sizes and in all price ranges, and has a reputation for building good-sounding speakers that have a lot of style. The Plus MoviePack Active, their starter home-theater system with a powered subwoofer, doesn't break with tradition—it's supermodel trim and has covergirl looks. And as its name implies, using it is about as simple as popping open a can of beer.

The Plus MoviePack Active ($1,995) includes four small Plus S satellites for main and surround duty, the sleek AV500 center speaker, and the tiny Plus Alpha 1 active subwoofer. All but the sub are clad in a super-slick black composite-plastic cabinet.

Each Plus S ($175 apiece) plants a 4-inch woofer with a rubber surround and a 1-inch fabric-dome tweeter in a sealed cabinet; the cabinet isn't shielded, but its small magnets shouldn't cause trouble in most real-world setups. The slim box measures only 8 x 4.75 x 4.25 inches (h/w/d) and weighs less than 4 pounds. Frequency response is optimistically rated by Canton at 45 to 30,000 Hz; power handling is spec'd at 40 watts "nominal" and 70 watts "music power."

In the AV500 center speaker ($400), a pair of 4-inch woofers flank a single 1-inch tweeter in a basic horizontal layout; the drivers are the same ones used in the Plus S. The slim 9.2-pound cabinet, which is ported bass-reflex-style as well as shielded, measures 5.3 x 17 x 4.2 inches (h/w/d); it'll be a good fit for TVs with 25- to 35-inch screens. Specs include frequency response of 40 to 30,000 Hz, a crossover frequency of 3,000 Hz, nominal impedance of "between 4 and 8 ohms," and power handling of 60 Hz nominal and 100 watts music power.

The Plus Alpha 1 ($1,100) packs a 12-inch paper-cone woofer with a rubber surround and an amplifier that's rated to deliver 100 watts into 4 ohms. The sealed particleboard cabinet measures a mere 15 x 14.1 x 13.5 inches (h/w/d) and weighs only 37.5 pounds.

Sub features include an active low-pass crossover for cutting off the sub's high-frequency output, enabling you to match the sub with the system's three front speakers; you can pick a cutoff point between 60 and 120 Hz, and frequencies above the cutoff point will roll off at about 12 dB per octave. The subwoofer will accept line-level inputs (via an RCA cable) or speaker-level inputs (via speaker wire); a fixed line-level high-pass filter with a cutoff of 80 Hz and a slope of 12 dB per octave is provided so you can keep the system's main speakers from doubling up on frequencies produced by the sub.

The sub has an adjustable auto-on feature; you can set it to stay on at all times or to shut off roughly 90 seconds

BY TOM NOUSAINE

after it's sensed that no signal is present. The Plus Alpha 1 also features a two-position switch labeled DIFF and GND, which lets you combat any hum that might be caused by the ground loops you sometimes get in a system that employs multiple AC outlets, weird grounding schemes, or summed channels (a system that has a single subwoofer output sums the low-bass output of the main left and right channels); if you hear hum, try flipping the switch. Finally, you get a level control and a detachable power cord; unusually (given the subwoofer's price), there's no phase control.

Each speaker in the 'Pack comes with a perforated-metal grille, similar to the kind you usually get with car stereo speakers. They look sharp, they're tough to damage, and they're acoustically transparent.

In terms of measurements, the Plus S had a system resonance frequency of 129 Hz and an on-axis frequency characteristic that rose at about 1.5 dB per octave from 100 to 20,000 Hz. This averaged out to about ±5.6 dB between 100 and 20,000 Hz, but the overall response shape was much smoother than that statistic suggests. Off-axis response, which reflects how the speaker will sound to those not sitting precisely in its "sweet-spot," was impressively flat, showing only a 2-dB drop at frequencies above 10,000 Hz—even at 45 degrees off-axis. Impedance reached a minimum of 3.9 ohms at 13,700 Hz, and sensitivity measured 89 dB with a 2.8-volt input.

The AV500 is tuned to 67 Hz, and the speaker had a minimum impedance of 4 ohms at 229 Hz. It reached 100 Hz at the half-power point; on-axis response ran ±4.4 dB from 100 to 20,000 Hz. At 30 degrees off-axis, a large response dip appeared between 1,000 and 6,000 Hz; at 45 degrees off-axis (which is pretty far to the side), the notch became less severe and moved down to about 500 Hz.

The Plus Alpha 1 had excellent low-bass extension for a subwoofer of its size—34 Hz at half power. Overall output was limited, however, measuring only 89 dB SPL at 40 Hz with 10 percent or less distortion (at levels higher than 10 percent, distortion is objectionable). Maximum output was 91 dB at 50 Hz with our 10-percent distortion ceiling; the 'Pack as a whole will produce about 94 dB SPL in a modestly sized room before distortion rears its head.

Installing the 'Pack was easy. I ran main speaker wires from my reference amps to the Plus Alpha 1, the Plus S surrounds, and the AV500 center; additional wire ran from the sub to the Plus S mains. The sole bug in the soup was that each speaker's banana-jack connectors are too widely spaced to accept standard dual-banana plugs.

Because the Plus S is small, you should mount the mains on stands or furniture that'll place them on a roughly even plane with the vertical center of your TV set; try keeping them about 6 feet apart and about 10 feet from where you'll be sitting. The AV500 should be centered on top of your set, and the Plus Alpha 1 should go in a corner of the room, to maximize appreciable output and extension. The Plus S surrounds can go in a variety of back-of-the-room locations, though I prefer my surrounds mounted on the room's side walls, a few feet behind my head and pointing toward one another.

Once I'd plugged the 'Pack in, I found that it's easily balanced. The only adjustment I had to make, in fact, was to the sub's active-crossover and level controls. Even then, the correct balance came with both controls centered (that's 80 Hz for the crossover).

Fired up with a variety of reference LDs and CDs, I found that the system sounded punchy and full much of the time, and dialogue and vocals often had a pleasant (though not completely natural) warmth—despite the low-frequency limitations I'd measured. Canton appears to have "voiced" the system this way to offset them. Without further adjustment, therefore, the 'Pack sounded best when action movies were pummeling me with special effects and with rock-and-roll CDs. Lowering the Plus Alpha 1's crossover and level controls can mitigate the added emphasis on low frequencies. Slightly altering the sub's proximity to the adjacent walls will also have an effect.

The 'Pack demonstrated impressive restraint when I cranked up the master volume; the woofers never bottomed or groaned. The Plus S mains are vulnerable given the relatively small diameter of their woofers, but the Plus Alpha 1's high-pass filter lets you neatly avoid trouble—use it.

CANTON'S PLUS MOVIEPACK ACTIVE offers several impressive benefits: Its components are small, so intrusion on your living space will be minimized. It looks great, so it can actually complement your decor. And it's easy to set up. While you can find a similarly priced system that delivers more accurate sound, it will probably come at the cost of size, style, and/or simplicity. The options are yours to weigh.

My only serious caution, therefore, regards output: The system's 94 dB of max clean output is much lower than what the best of the 'Pack's peers can kick out. In the real world, though, 94 dB is pretty darn loud—especially in a small room. Again, it all depends on your needs. If you aren't interested in rattling the china or humbling your friends, the 'Pack's virtues make a lot of sense. ■

THE SHORT FORM

CANTON PLUS MOVIEPACK ACTIVE

Component type: Home-theater speaker system
Price: $1,995
Target: Home-theater enthusiasts
Minimum requirements*: 27-inch TV set, Hi-Fi VCR, A/V receiver with Dolby Pro Logic decoding

KEY FEATURES

■ Main, center (shielded), and surround speakers plus a powered subwoofer ■ Rugged, perforated-metal grilles ■ Sub has low- and high-pass filters ■ Sub's DIFF/GND switch is designed to reduce electrical hum ■ Sub accepts line- and speaker-level inputs

SUMMARY

■ Stylish and compact ■ Easy to set up ■ The subwoofer had excellent low-bass extension for its size ■ Punchy, full sound ■ Gets loud enough to fill small and many mid-size rooms

Circle 117 on reader service card

*To maximize its potential

Sound & Vision

Mitsubishi HS-U760 S-VHS VCR

THANKS TO THE HOME THEATER boom, S-VHS machines that don't offer any special editing features, but are instead designed to serve as super recorders, make more sense than ever. The idea is that you can use the VCR's enhanced recording capabilities to preserve as much video quality as you can from high-resolution sources like DSS and LD as well as the DVDs we'll be seeing beginning this fall. Mitsubishi's HS-U760 is just such a machine.

As a relatively pricey VCR, the U760 ($799) also has a generous stock of features. The front-panel display is a cool blue and appears a bit busier than most, due primarily to the constant movement of two audio VU meters at the left; if they're too busy for you, you can turn them off by pressing the remote's DISPLAY button. The front panel (and the remote) also offers true jog/shuttle controls.

A/V inputs are located behind one flip-down door. There's a control for adjusting the input level of audio signals, which lets you use the U760 as a Hi-Fi audio recorder. And a window on the top of the VCR is on hand for controlling a compatible cable box; the owner's manual provides a list of 45 brands.

VCR Plus+ is provided for one-stop programming (after the always-tedious setup drill), and ordinary manual programming (up to eight events over 1 month) is simple. Commercials can be skipped upon playback by pressing the remote's QV (quick-view) button; each push shuttles 30 seconds of tape.

The front panel also has a button that activates PerfecTape, which automatically performs an evaluation of a tape's composition each time you load one up; after the roughly 15-second procedure is completed, the VCR is said to adjust itself for optimum recording with that particular tape stock.

The remote has a slight wedge shape to it, and it's simple and comfortable to use. The true jog/shuttle controls are always active and offer excellent frame-by-frame and rapid-search control; picture quality in the pause mode was jittery, however. These controls also do double-duty by letting you navigate the VCR's on-screen menus. A sub-menu offers a search function that hunts down a section of blank tape; this is very useful—though Mits could make it more convenient by letting you access it with a push of one remote button. Other options include repeat-play and skip-search. You can also search by time, telling the VCR to find a spot, say, 3.5 hours into a tape.

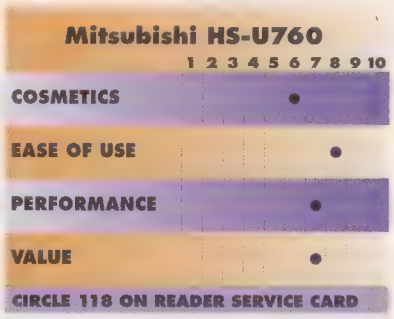
Rear-panel connections are extensive. You get two sets of A/V outputs, one S-Video out, one A/V-plus-S-Video in, and an edit-control jack for use with a compatible Mitsubishi-brand VCR. Another jack lets you hook up Mits' optional IR emitter (supplied by dealers at no cost), which lets the U760 control your cable box when you can't place it on top of the VCR. There's also a set of input and output jacks for linking the VCR with other members of Mits' proprietary Active A/V Network, for multi-component operation via a single compatible remote.

Picture quality was good for the S-VHS format, if not stellar. Horizontal resolution was 370 lines—a notch below the format's 400-line ceiling, but still light-years ahead of the 240 lines you get with basic VHS. We observed a chroma shift when playing back a recording of standard color-bar test patterns via the line-input jacks; it was hardly noticeable when we recorded real programs, though. A second test sample performed similarly. While objectionable, it's not the first time we've seen such a shift with a VCR, and it won't be the last.

I tried PerfecTape out with Scotch-brand VHS and S-VHS tape, but I couldn't see any difference in picture quality; a subsequent run through the lab revealed no measurable differences. The front-panel button lets you disable PerfecTape and revert to Mits' default settings.

The U760 excels in the audio department. Just having the audio-input control is reason to rejoice—even if you never touch it, your recordings will never be artificially compressed by an automatic level control. And if you like the idea of making long Hi-Fi audio mixes with a VCR, it's indispensable. The VU meters are a handy reference here, too. You might regret Mits' decision to leave off a headphone jack.

Home-theater enthusiasts with an itch to make high-quality recordings



are prime candidates for stripped-down S-VHS VCRs. Mitsubishi's HS-U760 offers some straightforward choices: Though competitive models may offer slightly better video performance, you get popular features like VCR Plus+ and cable-box control, a pair of helpful jog/shuttle controls, and superlative audio accommodations and performance. Pick 'em. —*Cliff Roth*

In Command

NAD Model 917 Preamp/Tuner/Processor

REMARKABLY, THERE ARE ONLY A FEW high-performance home-theater "controllers" that split the difference between affordable A/V receivers and "separate" four-figure denizens of the high end. NAD's Model 917 is just such a product, combining audio/video preamplification, a tuner, and surround-sound processing in a sleek, relatively affordable chassis. In essence, it's an A/V receiver without amplifiers that's designed to be used with one or more separate power amps. The 917 ($699) is also a solid, well-designed performer that's almost entirely free of wasteful frills.

The ampless design saves space, money, and hassle, while allowing you to choose just the amplifiers you need or want—or already own. The 917's layout is tried and true: You get AM/FM tuning with 19 presets, conventional audio controls via nice old-fashioned knobs, plenty of audio and video inputs and outputs, Dolby Pro Logic surround decoding, and three other surround modes. A/V ports number only three (VCR1, VCR2, and LD), but composite and S-Video jacks are provided for all. There's no phono input, but you do get two full tape loops plus AUX and CD. The 917 lacks a front-panel A/V input set but does include a headphone jack.

The simple front-panel display works well enough, showing characters for station frequency and small readouts for the selected input. Small LEDs set into pushbuttons denote an active surround mode and other active functions. The 917 also features a very basic on-screen display of input and channel levels. Overall, the component is plain-jane but attractive, and gets points for having easy-to-understand controls and legible panel graphics. Unfortunately, the remote control is another story; it's not even a universal learner.

I encountered no particular challenges in setting up the 917. But I did discover a couple of limitations: It has no full-range mode for the center channel, which means your center speaker will be cut off at 100 Hz no matter what. And though the subwoofer output can be filtered at 60 or 120 Hz (or run full-range), there's no corresponding high-pass filtering for the 917's main outputs—you'll need a subwoofer with a high-pass filter if you want to do true two-way filtering.

Up and running, the 917 sounded very good. Pro Logic performance featured very smooth pans and unusually cohesive output from the front channels. Dialogue leakage existed, but wasn't a factor. The 917 delivered consistent clarity, spaciousness, and plenty of headroom. It also aced the channel-balance test: Relative levels stayed locked over a wide range of master-volume settings. Equally important, DPL noise was low—inaudible from the listening position except with absolutely silent scenes at devil-may-care listening levels.

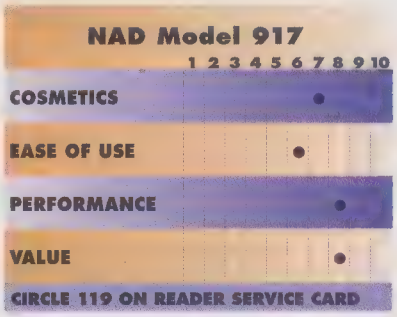
Unusually, the 917's three other surround modes were quite usable (probably because they don't employ any synthesized reverberation). The excellent HALL was similar to Pro Logic, but very, very subtle. CLUB and STADIUM were considerably more aggressive, but still musical and worthwhile with appropriate genres of music.

Video performance was good with the S-Video inputs and merely okay with the composite inputs; laserdisc images passing through the 917's composite loop suffered a noticeable loss in brightness and perhaps a bit of sharpness when compared to a direct-to-monitor connection.

FM sound from the 917 was very good. Strong signals were clean, quiet, and highly listenable; a live symphony broadcast was hugely dynamic, natural, and stirring. Fringe stations fared well, if not state-of-the-art. AM reception was above average compared to what you get with many receivers today.

Two unusual features deserve mention. CDR (Controlled Dynamic Range) is NAD's compression circuit. It works only with the surround modes, and is designed to keep a soundtrack's low-level elements audible when you've got system volume turned down low (as you might late at night). It worked well. The tradeoff is that climaxes like the big bus crash in *Speed* lose much of their drama, and occasionally CDR fooled the surround circuitry, yielding some strange steering errors—but there's no free lunch.

The SIBILANCE FILTER imposes a very mild rolloff on the top two octaves or so—again, only in the surround modes. It's intended to counteract the too-bright nature of many movie soundtracks (*á là* THX's re-equalization circuit), and it too worked well. It's also worth noting that the 917's BASS EQ control is much subtler, and more confined to the bottom octave or so, than similar circuits in other components.



Bottom line: I like NAD's no-bull Model 917 a lot. It does the job simply, effectively, and elegantly. This is one home-theater command center that performs very well, avoids gizmos, includes a fine tuner, and rounds things out with a couple of interesting—and useful—features. —*Daniel Kumin*

STICKING POINT

A Tape-Restoration Primer and Tips for Preserving Your Videotapes

NOW THAT ANOTHER HOLIDAY SEASON HAS PASSED, you've probably heard Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" enough times to last . . . well, forever. But you *will* hear the resonant strains of that old chestnut again. And the next time you do, consider this: Some of the last videotaped interviews with Crosby need to be restored—and they were recorded less than 20 years ago. The irony is that Crosby was largely responsible for funding the development of magnetic tape recording in the United States at the end of World War II.

The problem isn't limited to The Crosby Tapes, of course. Significant slices of professional and private videotape libraries—even those recorded as little as 10 years ago—may be in jeopardy. Potentially at risk is virtually our entire inventory of recorded media, from master audio recordings of symphonies to videotape recordings of the news—a history that's been painstakingly gathered over the last 40 years.

The threat comes from several sources, but the most worrisome is chemical in nature. As tape ages, the binder that holds the magnetic particles to a tape's polyester base breaks down. This process—known as "hydrolysis," or "sticky shed syndrome"—makes an affected tape extremely difficult to play. In the worst cases, the problem is so severe that the magnetic material literally falls off or "sheds" from the base, leaving little but a pile of dust and clear backing.

While hydrolysis is a real and tangible problem, it's by no means common. Technical editor Lance Braithwaite recently reviewed about 40 tapes he'd been carefully storing for between 10 and 17 years under real-world "living-room conditions" (stacked vertically in their cases away from radiators and direct sunlight). A few of the tapes showed relatively minor dropout problems in the first minute or two (near the spot where the tape is spliced to the leader), but there was no other significant deterioration.

Similarly, George McBride, manager of engineering at Maxell, adds this: "After 30 years of experience with audio tape, 21 years of experience with U-Matic [¼-inch videotape], and 18 years of experience with VHS and Betamax videotape in recommended storage conditions, I've seen little or no degradation of magnetic images. However, the most critical element to the longevity of any tape is the storage environment—specifically, humidity and temperature. If the tape reaches a high-moisture content, the binder system can begin to deteriorate and eventually cause the magnetic coating to separate from the base film. If the temperature is also elevated, the deterioration process may occur at an even faster rate.

"Customer returns [at Maxell] are tracked in terms of pieces-per-million. And those returns that may be described as being due to 'shedding' are so low that the probability is considered remote. However, the industry does not keep actual statistics on tape problems that occur over a long period of time in varying environmental conditions."

"Provided that you take reasonable precautions in the maintenance of your video library, we see no reason why high-quality videotapes should not last a very, very long time," adds Tim Sullivan, vice president of marketing at TDK. "The occasional anecdotal story of a tape self-destructing must always be balanced against unknowns like how the tape was stored and who manufactured the tape—even on the credibility of the storyteller. Having manufactured millions and millions of high-performance videocassettes over the years, TDK knows first-hand how durable videotape really is."

With reasonable care, therefore, videotape from a reputable manufacturer should enjoy long life. But no tape is safe from threats like accidental erasure, physical loss due to fire or flood, or the slow disappearance of the machines that are required to play tapes in various formats. And in professional circles, there are notorious and well-documented tales of important original masters languishing on shelves.

The electronics used to record and play back videotapes are an important factor in the equation. They've evolved considerably over the years, as have the industry reference standards applied to video signals. Early-generation equipment had more electronic variance, or "play," while current equipment requires a signal that conforms to much more exacting specifications. In addition, certain formats were never de-

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signed for broadcasting, industrial-quality performance, or even editing. Signals recorded using early-generation or inadequate gear must often be upgraded to conform to the tighter specifications required by current equipment.

The upgrade process is tough enough in its own right, and it's made more complex due to the intimate relationship between the tape and the playback electronics. The speed of the videotape is critical to proper playback; delays in timing are measured in microseconds, and mismatches can mean that a tape may never be able to be played back. Broadcast engineers can tell you that, not so long ago, the actual playback heads that were used to record a particular tape were often transported with the tape itself to insure proper playback.

IN CASES WHERE BREAKDOWN HAS STARTED to occur or is feared, restoration may be the answer. Restoration doesn't try to improve the visual quality of the signal with digital noise reduction or similar techniques. Rather, the goal is to make a restored master that's electronically superior to the original, while not tampering with the visual quality of the original. Tampering would do a long-term injustice, potentially pre-empting future technologies that might do a superior job of image restoration, noise reduction, or image enhancement. We can make an image more pleasing by removing high-frequency noise, for example, but removing it could prevent future technologies with more sophisticated means of high-frequency manipulation from reconstructing the image satisfactorily.

When a restoration is the way to go, a format must be selected. Though digital tape recording offers many obvious advantages (superior performance, pristine generation-to-generation dubbing and editing, and so on), the digital domain brings its own set of potential problems—catastrophic loss due to the obsolescence of a particular format, for example, or uncorrectable data errors. It's also reasonable to expect that digital tape, like analog tape, will show signs of chemical deterioration; tape *is* tape. The fact that digital tape can be far thinner than analog tape, and uses azimuth recording that depends on precise angle and phase relationships for proper playback, may create problems in the future when the tape has stretched, contracted, and potentially become affected by binder breakdown of one sort or another.

For these reasons, simultaneous restoration and remastering in both the analog and digital domains is the best way to go. This solution also offers the added security of storing two first-generation backups at two physical locations, thus increasing your chances of recovering from a natural disaster or other type of loss. Spreading the risk over two formats also lessens the risk of trouble with hardware or format obsolescence. Making and storing duplicate masters can get very expensive

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CIRCLE NO. 38 ON READER SERVICE CARD

very quickly, however.

Before a program is copied as part of the restoration process, it's usually cleaned or otherwise prepped, and hopeful technicians continue the search for the Holy Grail of cleaning solution—despite the fact that the chemistry, design, composition, and technology of different tapes (and the damage they may have suffered) are totally different from one reel to the next.

Currently, baking a tape at 130 degrees Fahrenheit for several hours is a favored way of temporarily reversing some of the effects of hydrolysis. Unfortunately, such treatment can destroy the master forever if the problem has not been properly diagnosed. The fact that no field test exists that can scientifically determine the level of hydrolysis damage or whether the tape has even suffered this type of damage hasn't proven to be much of a deterrent—technicians routinely bake tapes whether it might help or not. Tapes that have uneven pack stresses, chemical contamination, edge damage, or other physical maladies may be inexorably damaged by the baking procedure.

Alternatives to baking vary as widely as the needs of specific tapes. Tapes that have been contaminated in fires and floods often need to be washed and disinfected, and their videocassette shells and other components may need to be replaced. Other remedies include "ironing" (for tapes that have been severely folded or crushed) or treatment with chemical solvents (to remove the residue when a soft drink has been spilled on a tape). The last resort for severe physical damage is major surgery, where the damaged section is cut out of the tape and the surviving sections are spliced back together. And when it's been determined that the guides that hold the tape in proper position against the drum during recording were out of alignment, the exact degree of misalignment is measured and a duplicate misalignment is created temporarily in the playback machine.

Once a restored master has been created, the new tape must be stored, and this represents another doorway through which problems can enter. Many of the containers that have been designed to store magnetic tape actually contribute to their demise. Many early versions of so-called "shippers," which are the most sturdy type of container, were made of materials that we now know degrade badly. Neoprene foam gaskets that were designed to keep the shipper air- and watertight degenerate badly, leaving pieces of themselves deposited all over the tape. Other reels found a home in boxes with high acid contents. Still others are stored in styrene containers that deteriorate rapidly and offer little physical protection. Tapes stored on warped reels will be damaged every time they're played. Clearly, the best containers are made of inert plastic.

A TAPE-PRESERVATION CHECKLIST

There are many steps that you can take to minimize damage and protect your tapes.

- **Keep Tape Clean, Cool, Dry, and Safe.** Dirt, humidity, and heat are the main enemies of tape and can make playback impossible in very short periods of time. Hint: If it's too hot and humid for you, then it's probably too hot and humid for your videotape collection. You're also better off storing tapes in a place that has *constant* temperature and humidity. Tapes left for the curious to handle will be destroyed—it's only a matter of time.
- **Stack Tapes Vertically.** Tapes stored on their sides are subject to edge damage.
- **Avoid Magnetic Fields.** Store your tapes as far as possible from TVs, speakers, air conditioners, refrigerators, and other devices that employ induction motors. Over time, a strong magnetic field could subtly alter a tape's magnetic patterns, making playback difficult or inaccurate.
- **Check the Tape Pack for Smooth and Consistent Winding.** Tapes that have individual edges raised above the pack as a whole are prone to damage. Gaps probably indicate uneven pressure, which will get worse over time.
- **Always Wind.** Never leave a tape stopped in the middle of the cassette. Cassettes left "parked" in this fashion leave the tape that's outside the cassette shell unprotected. Audio tape should be stored "tails out" to minimize print-through.
- **Avoid Videotape Rewinders.** Most video rewinders are very inexpensive and subject the tape to questionable tension, which could literally snap the tape in half. Use your VCR to fast-forward or rewind a tape.
- **Avoid Brands You Don't Know.** While it may be tempting to save some change by purchasing "off-brands," stick to reputable tape manufacturers. Any increase in price you encounter will be justified by the peace of mind you'll enjoy.
- **Avoid Physical Damage.** Cardboard sleeves and inexpensive "library cases" provide little protection for either the cassette or the tape. Often, these inexpensive cases are made of materials that deteriorate over time. Protect your investment with a high-quality shipping case or inert plastic sleeve. These cases are inexpensive and reusable, and they'll last many years.
- **When in Doubt, Make a Copy.** If you only have one copy of a precious tape, *copy it*. Copies are inexpensive to make and are your only absolute protection against the loss of the program. Ideally, keep your copies in different places.
- **Check 'em Out.** View your collectible tapes every couple of years to ensure that they aren't deteriorating.
- **Verify Your VCR's Operation.** One of the biggest causes of tape damage is playback on a bad VCR. If you're uncertain about a machine's condition, perform a test-drive with a tape that isn't valuable to you. Never insert a tape that's known to be damaged into a VCR—it may damage the machine.
- **Label Your Tapes.** Unless a tape is properly labeled, the only way to know what's on it is to play it. And if the tape can't be played without restoration, how will you know whether the contents are valuable enough to justify restoration? Even a simple index-card system works.
- **Know When You Need Help.** Many times, local video shops or service techs simply aren't qualified to deal with videotape restoration. Become an expert, and know when to call for help. —*Jim Lindner*

Jim Lindner is president of VidiPax, a tape-restoration firm in New York City.

◀ mr. edit

The EV-S5000 ($1,399) is Sony's top consumer-grade Hi8 editing VCR. Edit features include jog/shuttle controls, rewritable time code, frame-by-frame playback, a LANC editing interface, a flying erase head, and eight-segment assemble editing. Other features include high-speed rewinding, auto tracking control, Hi-Fi stereo sound, and VCR Plus+. *Circle 120 on reader service card*

chewing scenery ▶

Samsung's SCH985 Hi8 camcorder ($900) features Hi-Fi sound, a color viewfinder, six auto-exposure modes (NORMAL, PORTRAIT, SPORTS, HIGH-SPEED SHUTTER, INDOOR, and SCENERY), a flying erase head, and 12X power zoom. Fade in and out, a multi-angle sports finder, and a wireless remote control are included. *Circle 121 on reader service card*

◀ as a tack

Sharp's VL-H420U Hi8 ViewCam ($1,899) has a 4-inch color LCD viewscreen; the LCD's built-in speaker and volume control enable instant playback of videos. Features include digital image stabilization, 8X optical and 20X digital zoom, and a 16:9 widescreen mode. Fade in and out, digital still, snapshot, and strobe functions, and a message mode are on tap. *Circle 122 on reader service card*

delta sigma scanna ▶

The DeltaScan-Pro ($695), from TV One Multimedia Solutions, converts high-resolution PC, Mac, and workstation graphics to NTSC or PAL video in real-time. The converter accommodates all vertical refresh rates for noninterlaced and interlaced signals, is 24-bit compatible, and stores up to 2 million colors; all functions can be controlled by the supplied remote or from *Windows*. Composite, component, S-Video, RGB, and computer-monitor outputs are on hand. *Circle 123 on reader service card* ■

VIDEOTEST

See Change

Hitachi's Hi8 VM-H100LA can set you free

TEST 834

I'M WORKING ON A THEORY THAT SAYS HITACHI'S engineers spend a lot of time at the beach . . . testing, that is. They must: In the past 2 years, two of their most interesting Hi8 camcorders—including the VM-H71A, our favorite Hi8 camcorder of 1994—have been waterproof. Now we have the striking VM-H100LA. This Hi8 cam comes in two parts—the camera is detachable and completely submersible in water, while the recorder stays with you on dry land. This puts the cam in a territory all its own.

The H100LA ($2,500) isn't just the camcording equivalent of Kevin Costner's amphibious hero from *Waterworld*. It's packed with high-end features like a 24X digital zoom, electronic image stabilization, and a 4-inch color LCD, and it's supplied with an unusually generous array of accessories.

The cam's design gives you all of the benefits of a 4-inch LCD—the H100LA is fun to use, and it's well suited to casual shooting. You can show just-shot footage to friends, hand the cam around, or simply enjoy your newfound freedom from viewfinder bondage. And, of course, you get something more: Separate the camera and recorder, and you can explore a new aquatic world. You'll have the tools to do it, too—the accessory pack includes a generous 3.5-meter-long extension cord for the detachable camera, a travel bag, a monopod, and a sunshade for the LCD. In short, the accessories let you fully realize the H100LA's heady outdoor potential.

It's clear that Hitachi put a lot of thought into this cam. It measures 7.1 x 7.8 x 3.1 inches (h/w/d), but at 2.7 pounds (without its lithium-ion battery or cassette) it seems quite light. All of the controls are located in logical positions on the recorder, within easy reach of your fingers. The camcorder is completely automatic, but there are options for enthusiasts—you'll find manual focus, jacks for an external mic and headphones, and fades, wipes, and zooms.

The H100LA is designed for two-handed more-or-less horizontal shooting, so in normal use you look down on the recorder and LCD from above, with the camera pointing forward. The mic is located at the front, along with the eject button and adjustable-volume speaker. The camera unit attaches to the recorder body by a small swiveling platform, which allows the camera to slide on and lock in place; it's also hinged and can be folded against the camcorder, out of the way. The swivel's 120-degree rotation allows a wide variety of shooting options.

I quickly noticed that I was using

BY STEWART APPLEGATH

the H100LA differently than I would a conventional rig, and it's the detachable camera that makes the difference. The camera's compact waterproof housing easily fits in one hand; the camera and the coiled cord that connect it to the recorder reminded me of an electric razor. With the camera separated, you just feel less constrained from moving and choosing what to shoot. You can "shoot" with one hand and simultaneously observe the image on the recorder in the other.

The 3.5-meter extension cable gives you the freedom this outfit demands. The integral coiled cable stretches to about 2 feet; once connected (via a watertight joint), the two cables give you about 4 meters of cable with which to work.

While you might never use a conventional cam at very close range, you'll probably tend to do so with the H100LA: I naturally started to explore things in detail; skin became a landscape, and everyday objects took on a monumental scale. Given the camera's lightness, I found that I used it more intuitively, like a microphone, or shot from high or low angles. Simply put, you can add lots of variety to your footage—variety you couldn't imagine otherwise. And this was before it passed the Timex torture test.

I'm pleased to report that after being submerged for 20 minutes in 1 foot of bathtub water (10 minutes and 2 feet short of the maximum Hitachi recommends), the H100LA showed no ill-effects; the camera was still shooting, with no discernible damage to its mechanism. While this camcorder isn't designed for tracking sharks on the Great Barrier Reef, it should prove more than adequate for modest underwater inquiries at the beach or in a pool, pond, or fish tank.

As mentioned, there are plenty of other features at your disposal, but they don't get in the way of the cam's functionality. The LCD and all of the camera and VTR controls are located on the "back," or top, of the recorder. The LCD renders colors accurately with the factory settings, and you can adjust brightness, color, and tint from the LCD MENU. The LCD was most readable when the recorder was perpendicular to my gaze; when the cam's separated, however, you can keep the LCD right where you want it, moving the camera instead. This simply makes the H100LA more flexible than other LCD-equipped cams.

The sunshade that comes with the H100LA is a truly practical device—it doesn't just keep the sun from washing out the image, but also protects the screen from fingerprints and the debris that'll inevitably accumulate in the travel bag. It snaps on easily, then opens and closes like those old-time top-view cameras.

The start/stop record button is located to the right of the LCD, just below the main mode switch and the zoom/wide-angle lever. The H100LA's VTR controls are easy to use. They're operated with a playback pad that configures STOP, PLAY, FF, and REW on a simple circular control. The FF and REW controls let you shuttle the tape quickly without seeing the image on-screen or implement a high-speed visual scan without having to hold down the controls. There's search capability in CAMERA mode, but no specific button for it; rather, you simply activate the FF or REW functions and look for what you want.

Other controls lie behind the LCD in groups meant for your left and right hands. FOCUS/VOLUME controls both manual focus (in CAMERA mode) and speaker volume (in VIDEO mode, Hitachi's name for the VTR mode); pushing them simultaneously while shooting accesses the manual-focus mode. Above these controls is the infrared/remote command sensor; the supplied remote lets you operate basic dubbing, speaker volume, a Synchro edit function, a titler, and the 24X zoom. A backlight button gives you manual control of exposure (the H100LA usually handles it automatically), and you can lock in a setting through the menu system if you plan to shoot a backlit subject for some time.

The full-range autofocus system works very well, and, as mentioned, you can get some great macro shots automatically if you break out the camera. The 10X-optical/24X-digital zoom system is controlled by the mechanical tele/wide zoom lever. The "instant-zoom" feature digitally magnifies your image 1.5 times regardless of where

BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger–Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: camera, 400 lines; LCD, 240 lines; Hi8, 380 lines; 8mm, 250 lines
Playback picture S/N (at analog outputs): unweighted luminance, 44.4 dB; weighted luminance, 49.9 dB; unweighted video, 40.7 dB; weighted video, 49.6 dB; chroma AM, 42.6 dB; chroma PM, 42.3 dB
Minimum illumination: 9.2 lux for 50 IRE
Audio frequency response: 40–7,000 Hz +1, –3 dB; 20–20,000 Hz +0.1, –6.38 dB
Audio dynamic range: 69 dB
Audio THD plus noise: 0.3%

THE SHORT FORM

HITACHI VM-H100LA

Component type: Hi8 camcorder
Price: $2,500
Target: Casual and serious videographers

KEY FEATURES

■ Two-piece component camcorder ■ 4-inch color LCD screen ■ Detachable waterproof camera ■ 3.5-meter-long extension cord ■ Electronic image stabilization ■ 10X optical, 24X digital zoom ■ 1.5X instant zoom ■ Manual focus ■ Multiple fade options ■ Mirror-image display mode ■ 16:9 recording ■ Built-in speaker ■ Volume control ■ Stereo mic ■ Travel bag ■ Monopod ■ Sunshade ■ Remote control

SUMMARY

■ All the benefits of a conventional LCD-equipped cam ■ Two-piece design vastly increases shooting options ■ Well designed, well balanced, and easy to use ■ Autofocus and stabilization systems worked very well ■ Mic's location limits soundtrack potential in some shooting scenarios ■ Good Hi8 performance ■ Fair audio performance ■ Handled underwater use with no ill-effects ■ A fun, flexible, unique LCD cam

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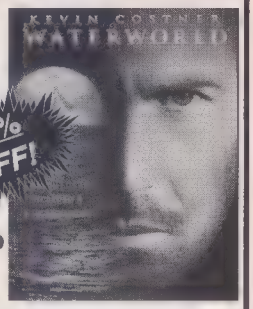

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the regular zoom rests, increasing max zoom potential to 36X. As with most cams, I noticed significant image degradation at the higher digital-zoom settings.

Because of the extensive freehand use the H100LA invites, the electronic image stabilizer needs to do its job well, and it did: It was smooth and, like those on many other cams, ran into difficulty only at the most extreme zoom positions. The supplied monopod comes in handy here.

The H100LA offers three types of fades, all triggered by the FADE button and the record/standby switch, kicking in and out only at the beginning or end of your shots. There's a white fade, a "wipe fade" that looks like two black horizontal doors opening from the center, and a "zoom fade" that fades in or out from white and zooms in on or out from your subject.

In the most common "straightahead" shooting position, your right hand will be poised to control the LCD MENU and CAMERA MENU buttons. In conjunction with the playback pad, they access the stabilizer and the cam's auxiliary functions. LCD MENU offers electronic stabilizer on/off, backlight lock/unlock, 16:9 formatting, LCD on/off, display information on/off, and date. The submenu for display info provides access to a number of functions: You can see auxiliary information on-screen, find footage shot on a specific date, and clear the screen of everything but a REC legend and the battery-charge icon, among other things. Overall, the menu system was easy to navigate.

Flip the panel just below the main camera controls and you'll see three buttons. Two control the cam's record/pause functions during playback or when recording from a line source. Press the third, MIRROR, for 3 seconds and the picture on the LCD will be inverted, enabling you to monitor it upside down. This feature works in both primary modes, but note that it doesn't actually record the image upside down—it just displays it that way.

The lithium-ion battery is small and light, and keeps the cam rolling for about 30 minutes when the LCD is active. You can charge it inside the recorder with the power-mode switch set to OFF; alternatively, you can charge two batteries in sequence, with one in the supplied adaptor and one in the camcorder.

Tape cassettes load from the top-front of the cam. Just below the tape slot is a plastic panel that can be pulled out to support the camera and/or recorder for both shooting and playback in the upright position. A sturdy integral rubber cover protects the mic and headphone jacks. The supplied stereo A/V output cable includes one S-Video, one composite video, and left/right audio outputs. An optional input cable (VM-CH91IN; $25) is available from Hitachi. The H100LA can also record programs from your TV.

One misgiving about the cam's design: The flexibility afforded by the two-piece configuration is somewhat offset by the fact that the built-in microphone is located on the recorder. Unless you can keep an external mic in the vicinity of the camera, the sounds you pick up really won't be tied to the images you're recording. The best solution would have been to include a small mic on the camera, though it would have to be waterproof.

In terms of picture quality, the H100LA came up with a respectable 380 lines of horizontal resolution—not the pinnacle of Hi8 performance, but very good nonetheless. I thought its color rendition was very natural, which was a relief given the fact that there's no manual white-balance control. The H100LA also did a better job with sharpness and picture noise than any LCD-equipped cam I've tested.

Audio performance was about average, with voices sounding crisp if a bit thin. The stereo electret-condenser mic picked up sounds well, and I heard little tape-transport noise. The tiny built-in speaker did a fine job for typical on-the-spot use.

THOUGH THE TWO-PIECE DESIGN OF HITACHI'S VM-H100LA takes some getting used to, I quickly came to appreciate its incredible versatility and practicality. The cam isn't inexpensive, but that versatility still makes it a very good value. If you like the large-LCD approach to camcording, then you must give the H100LA a test-drive—it's a winner even if the closest beach is a thousand miles away. Now, if only Hitachi could come up with a sand-proof version. . . . ■

Viewmaster

JVC's GR-SV7 offers a new perspective

TEST 835

THOUGH THE DIGITAL VIDEO CAMCORDER FORMAT HAS come steamrolling into town and is lustily grabbing up headlines, the fact is that the vast majority of camcorders that'll be bought this year will be analog models. That still leaves most camcorder buyers with many exciting choices, though—no-frills models, "fun" cams, and tools that'll appeal to serious (but budget-conscious) videographers among them. JVC's GR-SV7, with its multi-angle 4-inch color LCD viewscreen, point-and-shoot simplicity, and extensive automatic features, clearly falls into the fun camp. And its S-VHS roots mean that the pictures you'll have fun taking will look great.

I can't quite decide whether the SV7 ($2,000) looks like a neat video toy or an eclectic contraption. The crux of the matter is its flip-up color LCD, which normally resides on the *front* of the cam; the overall design gives the cam a kind of '50s retro look. The SV7 isn't a one-trick pony, though. Useful features include a smart black-and-white backup viewfinder, assorted digital special effects, excellent self-recording capabilities, and a feature that turns the cam into a video message center.

With the LCD folded in, the SV7 is reminiscent of other big-LCD models. It's no me-too design, of course, as the location of the LCD attests. In its front-facing configuration, the LCD lets human subjects view themselves while you're shooting them via the backup finder; alternatively, you can point the lens at yourself and watch yourself on the LCD, which is great if you like to make diary-style videos. For more conventional shooting, the LCD flips up and comes to rest on the top of the cam's body; in this configuration, the LCD faces in the opposite direction of the lens and you use it to view your subjects. A release clip lets you tilt the screen down (by approximately 30 degrees from vertical), enabling you to hold the cam over your head and look up at the LCD—great if you're standing in or behind a crowd.

A nice touch is that JVC provides a sunshade for the LCD. This makes the LCD much more viewable when the cam's used outdoors under bright-sun conditions. The shade folds up, protecting the screen's surface from scratches. (Too bad there's no cap to provide similar protection for the lens.)

The front-facing LCD certainly is interesting. My infant son loved watching himself as I recorded him, but adults gave the experience mixed reviews. As a video-savvy dad trying to get my reluctant wife to shoot videos of my son and me together, I appreciated the ability to see the framing on the LCD and pontificate when something was out of whack.

BY CLIFF ROTH

The black-and-white backup viewfinder is another nice touch. It's located in the top-right corner, directly behind and in line with the lens. You can use it when you don't want to use the LCD (or can't get good results with it). In this configuration, the LCD is locked into its front position. You can turn off the finders independently to save battery power and/or eliminate the video-mirror effect.

The small lens has a 10X optical range (4.5 to 45 mm) and a f1.6 aperture. The zoom control is a lever you operate with your right thumb. It has variable speeds—the slowest takes about 13 seconds to sweep through the full optical range, while the fastest takes less than 3 seconds. Like most new cams, the lens automatically handles macro shots (where the subject is very close to the lens). But the SV7 also goes one better by automatically zooming out, when necessary, to get good focus. Nice.

A digital-zoom feature extends the optical range to 20X or 100X, selectable via the menu system: A line appears in the zoom bar-graph of the finder display, indicating when you've crossed into digital turf. At 20X the picture looks noticeably grainier, but it's passable; beyond that it becomes coarse.

Though some manual-override controls are present, serious videographers looking for a tool they can fiddle with will be disappointed. The manual focus requires holding down the focus button and simultaneously pressing the zoom controls—not nearly as workable as a focus ring around the lens. Manual exposure modes don't exist. There is a backlight-compensation option, but it's buried in a special-effects menu and not much use when shooting on the fly. The white-balance override is excellent, however, with separate settings for SUNNY, CLOUDY, and INDOOR (halogen) light as well as a pro-style manual mode that lets you make custom adjustments off of a white card. It takes some work—six to nine button pushes—to get to this feature, though.

Special effects are extensive. The most prominent—and gimmicky, in my opinion—is the snapshot mode, which is activated by a button in the middle of the main power control. It records a 3-second-long freeze-frame image with a white border, which does a pretty good impression of a photograph. At the same time, this mode creates distinctive still-camera sound effects. *Papparazzi* will love it.

Press the FADE/WIPE button and a menu listing a choice of five scene transitions appears: the normal black fader, a mosaic fader, a door wipe (opening and closing like elevator doors), a window wipe (the new image starts out as a small rectangle in the middle of the image and expands to fill the screen), and, the most powerful, the dissolve (one shot ends with a freeze frame and dissolves into the beginning of the next shot). The dissolve won't work in conjunction with some of the special effects and requires some forethought, but when used properly it creates very polished in-camera edits. An auto fader function cycles between these effects as well as several other simple wipes that can't be activated any other way.

The P.AE/EFFECT button brings up a menu with five choices—CLASSIC FILM (a combination of black-and-white, letterbox, and strobe), CINEMA (letterbox), SPORTS (high-speed shutter), BACK LIGHT, and SLOW SHUTTER. Though low-light performance is otherwise average, it's truly fantastic in SLOW SHUTTER—even dimly lit corners of a room will be clearly visible. The downside is that the picture will have a blurry, stroboscopic quality.

A slightly less blurry, but less effective, boost in low-light performance is available by going into the GAIN UP submenu, which is located within the MENU menu. You have a choice between off, auto gain control, and an automatic switch to SLOW SHUTTER. MENU also lets you adjust the brightness of the LCD, activate/deactivate digital image stabilization (which reduces picture resolution slightly), limit the digital zoom range, adjust white balance, and go into the 5-second record mode (which records 5 seconds of footage each time you press the START/STOP button). Page two of MENU selects a "squeeze" recording mode for widescreen viewing, beep on/off (for confirming function activation or preserving sanity, respectively), and other options.

Measured video performance was very good. Though horizontal resolu-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 74

BY THE NUMBERS

Measurements by Berger–Braithwaite Labs

Horizontal resolution: camera, 450 lines; EVF, 350 lines; VCR, 380 lines (S-VHS), 230 to 240 lines (VHS)
Playback picture S/N (at analog outputs): unweighted luminance, 48.2 dB (SP), 49.8 dB (EP); weighted luminance, 51.8 dB (SP), 52.6 dB (EP); unweighted video, 42.7 dB (SP), 41.6 dB (EP); weighted video, 49.8 dB (SP), 49.9 dB (EP); chroma AM, 44.3 dB (SP), 41.3 dB (EP); chroma PM, 44.5 dB (SP), 41.4 dB (EP)
Minimum illumination: 27.2 lux for 50 IRE
Audio frequency response: Hi-Fi, 20–20,000 Hz +0.5, –0.3 dB; linear, –3 dB from 150–11,000 Hz (SP), 140–2,000 Hz (EP)
Audio dynamic range: 73.6 dB
Audio THD plus noise: Hi-Fi, 0.3%; linear, 0.9%

THE SHORT FORM

JVC GR-SV7

Component type: S-VHS-C camcorder
Price: $2,000
Target: Enthusiasts looking to make fun, no-hassle, high-quality videos

KEY FEATURES

■ Multi-angle 4-inch LCD ■ Black-and-white backup viewfinder ■ LCD sunshade ■ 10X optical zoom, 20X and 100X digital zoom ■ Extensive digital effects ■ Digital image stabilization ■ Message mode ■ Wireless remote control ■ In-camera video-insert and audio-dub editing ■ VHS Hi-Fi stereo sound ■ Junction box

SUMMARY

■ Multi-angle LCD grants shooting flexibility ■ Point-and-shoot simplicity ■ Few manual controls ■ Video performance was very good ■ Excellent Hi-Fi stereo sound ■ Fun to use and a genuine innovation

Circle 125 on reader service card

The Elite VSA-99 is the most innovative receiver ever created. An audio/video receiver designed with one goal, to give you the most realistic theater sound possible. With the touch of a button, your entire system comes alive with Dolby® Surround AC-3.™

AC-3 gives your ear the distinct pleasure of hearing six independent digital signals. And duplicates for your home the thrilling performance of digital surround sound which, until now, was heard exclusively in top theaters. The Accurate Imaging System consistently distributes 100 watts to each channel, all with discrete amplifiers, delivering the full bandwidth (20Hz to 20kHz) provided by AC-3. And the Intelligent System Control brings the operation of all your components, including those of other brands, to your fingertips.

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ELITE
BY PIONEER

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Gold Standard

Gold Disk *Video Director* Edit-Controllers

A PIONEER IN THE CONSUMER desktop-video arena, Gold Disk's *Video Director* line has always offered simple, affordable edit-control via *Windows* (and, in the "old days," via Commodore's Amiga platform). With the *Video Director Home* ($50) and *Video Director Suite Version 2.5* ($199) cuts-only edit-controllers, they've taken the next step in consumer compatibility by adding IR as well as LANC control of camcorders.

Designed for extreme ease of use, *Home* is strictly a cuts-only editor. *Suite 2.5* is identical, but adds one feature as well as the ability to upgrade: If you've got a sound card, *Suite 2.5* lets you add .WAV-format sounds to your videos. And if you add an optional video overlay/encoder ($349), you can also work in titles, still video images, and even animation.

Installation of *Home* and *Suite 2.5* is amazingly simple. You turn off your computer, plug the supplied SmartCable into an available serial port (it has both 9- and 25-pin connectors), and point the IR transmitter/receiver at your record deck. If you have an 8mm or Hi8 cam with LANC control, you plug the *Director*'s LANC jack into the cam's LANC input; if your camcorder doesn't have LANC, you position the cam on top of your VCR so that the IR transmitter/receiver is pointing at both of them. Then plug your cam's A/V outputs into your VCR's A/V inputs, turn your computer back on, and install the supplied software in *Windows*.

The first time you go into *Home* or *Suite 2.5*, the software will ask you whether your camcorder is using LANC or IR remote control. Make the appropriate selection, and it'll walk you through a configuration process. Next, it'll ask you to set up your VCR; a list of models from which to choose will be displayed. Select the appropriate one, test it to make sure it's being recognized, and you're ready to start editing.

If you need optimal accuracy, there are advanced options for configuring your VCR and cam. They're not hard to implement, and I recommend using them—after "tweaking" the configuration, I was able to get my LANC camcorder and editing VCR to within three-frame accuracy at the start of edits and to about eight-frame accuracy at the end. (Accuracy at the end of cuts suffers a bit because *Video Director* doesn't provide a clear "end-edit" setting; it'd be a nice touch for next-generation versions.)

The interfaces are extremely user-friendly. To log the footage you want to edit, you'll see an on-screen camcorder with control icons like PLAY, FAST FORWARD, PAUSE, and EJECT along with two notepad-like boxes at the bottom marked CAMCORDER TAPE and SCRIPTS. When you place your first video to be edited into your cam, the software asks you to calibrate the tape by rewinding it to the beginning. You then play the tape using the control icons, select clips by pressing the START OF CLIP and END OF CLIP icons, and save clips with names of your own device; these names then appear in the CAMCORDER TAPE notepad.

Once you're done selecting clips, you create a SCRIPT, or edit decision list, by giving the SCRIPT notepad a name and dragging your clips over from the CAMCORDER TAPE notepad. You can shuffle clips around on the SCRIPT and even trim or add to their length. You can also create multiple SCRIPT and CAMCORDER TAPE logs, so you can save old projects while you're working on new ones.

When you've finished the SCRIPT for your current project, you click on the MAKE TAPE icon, which changes the lower half of the screen to an image of a VCR. Stick a blank tape in your real VCR, press the MAKE TAPE NOW icon, and the system will do the rest.

My only complaint about *Home* and *Suite 2.5* is that their manuals and help screens are something less than fully informative; while it's not that big a deal with *Home*, *Suite 2.5*'s extra abilities occasionally set you adrift at sea. Even so, both of Gold Disk's new edit-controllers get high marks in my book. They combine low cost with compatibility, accuracy, and ease of use. You'd be hard-pressed to go wrong with either one.

—Tim Liebe

Gold Disk *Home*

	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
COSMETICS	●
EASE OF USE	●
PERFORMANCE	●
VALUE	●

CIRCLE 126 ON READER SERVICE CARD

Gold Disk *Suite 2.5*

	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
COSMETICS	●
EASE OF USE	●
PERFORMANCE	●
VALUE	●

CIRCLE 127 ON READER SERVICE CARD

People aren't exactly crazy about commercials. So with that fact in mind, we've created the RCA Commercial Advance™ VCR. A brand new VCR which can fast forward through most of the commercials when you play back any recorded program.* So, how does it work? You put in a tape. You hit record. And when the show is over, simply play back your tape and this VCR automatically skips through most commercials. No ads for miracle vinyl cleaners. Or battery-powered cheese graters. Just your favorite show with a lot fewer interruptions. Add Auto Clock Set† and full RCA brand DSS® System compatibility and you've got one serious VCR. The revolutionary new RCA Commercial Advance VCR. It's the next big innovation in VCRs.

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D.W. Griffith, Carl Laemmle, Jr., and Sid Grauman with the Fox Movietone device, the first self-contained system for recording synchronous movie soundtracks.

1996: Deja Vu

Once again, ONKYO writes a new scene into the home theater script with our new TX-SV828 receiver. It's got all the classic ONKYO hallmarks—discrete amplifier design for incredible power, all-digital soundfield circuits—plus the latest surround sound innovations developed in conjunction with our global technology partners Motorola (the TX-SV828 uses the new 24 Bit DSP microcomputer), Lucasfilm and Dolby. This dream team combination makes the TX-SV828 today's preeminent home theater receiver with the most advanced THX® processing and cinema acoustics accomplished to date.

Then we thought about tomorrow.

So we designed our new ED-901 AC-3 Processor. When you add the ED-901 to the TX-SV828 (or any compatible component), you create a home theater system that simply has no equal in terms of performance—not only for today, but well into the future. In typical ONKYO fashion, we've even improved on AC-3 by incorporating Lucasfilm Cinema Re-EQ processing into the ED-901. The result is a tonal balance for AC-3 movies that matches the standards Lucasfilm sets for its theaters, acknowledged as the world's finest acoustic venues for motion pictures.

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CIRCLE 72 ON FREE INFORMATION CARD

SOFTWIRE

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DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE

EVERYTHING YOU COULD POSSIBLY want in a *Die Hard* movie is in your face in installment number three, *Die Hard With a Vengeance*: Wry New York City detective John McClane (Bruce Willis) is still thumbing his nose at his superiors, an effete foreign-born villain (Jeremy Irons) is still trying to steal a fortune by means of a fantastically complex plan, and vehicles of every description blow up resoundingly. *Vengeance* (TCF/Image; VHS, priced for rental, CLV discs, $50) also has the advantage of being set in Manhattan, where the always-crowded streets and subways magnify the effect of the mayhem. Another plus is the presence of Samuel L. Jackson as a Harlem resident named Zeus, who inadvertently becomes McClane's de facto partner—their racially charged repartee is extremely amusing, and Zeus proves nearly as capable and resilient as McClane (logic and credibility were never central to this series' gameplan). The LD is treated to the proper 2.35:1 widescreen dimensions and killer Dolby Surround AC-3. If you're looking for fireworks, this is it.

—*Andy Wickstrom*

Bombs away: *Vengeance*'s Jackson and Willis confront a briefcase full of juice

WATERWORLD

FORGET THE HYPE: NOW THAT THE smoke generated by its huge budget has cleared, it's easy to see *Waterworld* (MCA/Universal; VHS, priced for rental, CLV discs, $45) for the highly entertaining—if messy—extravaganza it is. For the uninitiated, the polar ice caps have melted and submerged the continents. What we get is *The Road Warrior* on jet-skis—only it's more like a soggy *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, as the protagonists spend a good 2 hours searching for dry land. But, hey, who can resist Costner as a mutant with gills? And there's enough stunts to keep the *Terminator* set jumping. The only downer is that Dennis Hopper's bad guy has hardly any good lines—except when he dubs our hero "The Gentleman Guppie." It may be bloated and self-indulgent, but *Waterworld* doesn't sink.

—*Ken Korman*

JUDGE DREDD

THE OPENING CREDITS OF *JUDGE Dredd* (Hollywood; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40) present a montage of comic-book covers, intended to remind its audience of Dredd's pen-and-ink origins. Then, with R-rated

Fire fighter: *Waterworld*'s Costner

explicitness, the film sets about squeezing all the fun out of fantasy. Dredd lives in the next millennium, where most of Earth is a wasteland and only an elite corps of supercops—the Judges—stands between civilization and chaos. It's a rather tired premise, and the movie brings nothing new to the game. Sylvester Stallone is Dredd, in search of his evil twin (Armand Assante), a Judge gone bad. Stallone plods grimly from one gun battle to the next, his delivery making RoboCop sound like Olivier. Former *Saturday Night Liver* Rob Schneider has intermittent success as a craven con who becomes Dredd's comical sidekick, and Diane Lane has a throwaway part as a Judge who'd like the big lug to smile a bit more. Perish the thought—*Judge Dredd* is scary enough as it is.

—*AW*

NINE MONTHS

NINE MONTHS (TCF/IMAGE; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40), the easy-going, good-natured comedy from megastar director Chris Columbus (*Home Alone*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*), is so relentlessly sweet that its occasional profanity seems out of place (and the scandal involving star Hugh Grant, which broke just days before its release, seems to belong to an alternate

Sun screen: *The Net*'s Bullock

universe). To say that *Nine Months* leans on Grant's boyish sincerity is to understate the point. Julianne Moore takes off some of the heat as the other half of a happily unmarried couple thrown into turmoil when pregnancy strikes, and Robin Williams and Tom Arnold are clearly in their element as an incompetent Russian doctor and an oafish used-car salesman, respectively. Note to trivia buffs: an art-imitates-life mug-shot sequence with Grant has been cut from the home-video version, for obvious reasons. —*KK*

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

JULIA ROBERTS REBOUNDS GRACEfully from the dismal *I Love Trouble* in *Something to Talk About* (Warner; VHS priced for rental, CLV disc, $35), a comedy about a marriage on the rocks. The pairing of the perky Roberts as Grace, the wronged wife, and charming Dennis Quaid as Eddie, the unfaithful husband, hints from the outset that a reconciliation is in order. But the movie, written by Callie Khouri (*Thelma & Louise*) and directed by Lasse Hallström (*My Life as a Dog*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*), doesn't settle for cute spats or preachiness. It's a genuine, carefully balanced critique of the social pressures that compel women to "stand by their men" no matter what dirt they're dealt. Grace demands something better, and Eddie has to grow up sufficiently to recognize that he can deliver it. Their troubles are paralleled by a similar crisis that ignites between her parents, who are well played by Robert Duvall and Gena Rowlands. A tedious subplot threatens to undo the film, but Roberts' portrait of a contemporary woman in transition carries the day. —*AW*

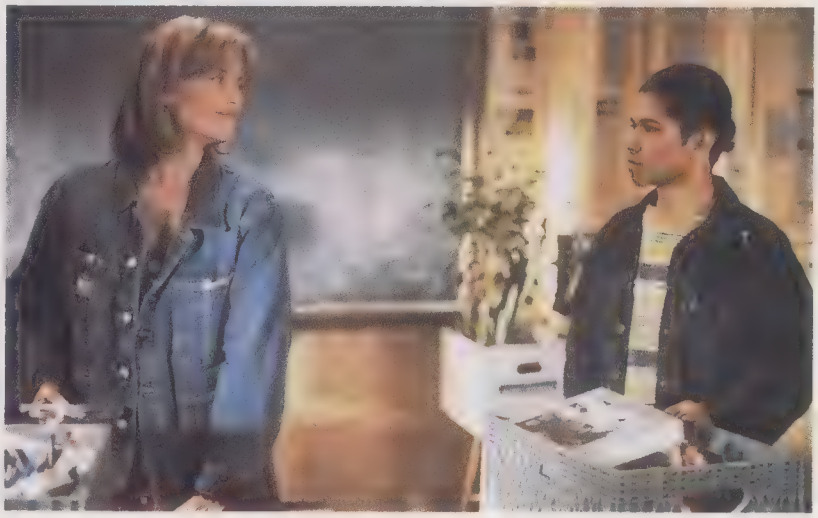
THE NET

A CAUTIONARY TALE FOR THE INFORmation age, *The Net* (Columbia TriStar; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40) hitches a ride on Sandra Bullock's familiar good-girl persona. Bullock plays a highly paid software troubleshooter whose only contact with fellow humans comes through the Internet. She receives a floppy disk that could expose a plot to control America's computers, and *voilà*—her identity vanishes from society's computer terminals. To add insult to injury, the police think she's a wanted criminal. The story only hits full stride, though, when she tries to tell the police that no one in town but her former shrink can identify her on sight. A few plot holes snag *The Net* as it moves along, but Bullock keeps us caring through the power of her righteous indignation. Even comedian Dennis Miller does a nice turn as the shrink. The next time you download a file from the Net, you may think twice. —*KK*

DANGEROUS MINDS

TO PARAPHRASE AN OLD (DUMB) TV commercial, don't hate Michelle Pfeiffer because she's beautiful. Give her half a chance here and she'll do a thorough job of convincing you that she's little ol' Louanne Johnson, a novice teacher (and ex-Marine) sent to babysit a class of urban misfits in *Dangerous Minds* (Hollywood; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40). Equally convincing are the young actors, including Renoly Santiago and Wade Dominguez, who portray these hip-hop hardheads, marking time on the road to nowhere and disdainful of virtually everything. Louanne breaks through their walls (perhaps a little too easily)

Class action: Pfeiffer and Santiago grin and bear it in *Dangerous Minds*



and changes a few lives, so that by the end everyone is in tears . . . and that's when (surprise) it all hits the fan. If the film sometimes seems like a hit soundtrack looking for a vehicle, know that *Minds*, which is based on the experiences of the real-life Louanne Johnson, does have important things to say about survival and self-respect. If you don't mind its MTV attitude, this class gets a passing grade. —*AW*

CLUELESS

CLUELESS (PARAMOUNT/PIONEER; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40) could easily be subtitled "Ridgemont High: The Next Generation," as the two films share the sharp eyes and ears of writer/director Amy Heckerling, who clearly knows from teen angst and hip of-the-moment slang. And the film does have a clue, thanks to the surprising performance of Alicia Silverstone as 15-year-old Cher (named, just like her best friend Dionne, after "a famous singer who now does infomercials"), the Beverly Hills deb who sees her mission in life as "converting the clueless." (Ah, sweet irony.) *Clueless* benefits greatly from Heckerling's awareness of her subject matter's limitations; after all, we're not exactly talking Shakespeare here. When handled right, the depiction of teen trials and tribulations can be both humorous and riveting, and Heckerling nails it cold. As Cher's stepbrother and eventual love interest Josh (Paul Rudd) asks, "Do you have

Book bind: Rudd, Silverstone in *Clueless*

NOW IN STORES

AMADEUS
1984. THX AC-3 Special Edition. F. Murray Abraham, Tom Hulce, Elizabeth Berridge, Simon Callow; dir. Milos Forman. The director supervised this transfer of his Oscar-winning film about Mozart; extras include a making-of documentary, audio commentaries, a glorious 50-page color photo book, and a two-CD soundtrack. Dolby Surround AC-3. (PG) 159 min. LD letterboxed (2.35:1) $160. Pioneer.

CLIVE BARKER'S LORD OF ILLUSION
1995. Scott Bakula, Famke Janssen, Kevin J. O'Connor; dir. Clive Barker. Just when you thought it was safe to go back in your brain. . . . Includes 11 extra minutes of footage cut from the theatrical release. DTS Surround. (R) or (NR) 109 min./120 min. VHS priced for rental. Unrated LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $35. MGM/UA/Image.

DR. JEKYLL AND MS. HYDE
1995. Sean Young, Tim Daly, Lysette Anthony, Harvey Fierstein; dir. David Price. A gender-bending take on the old tale, with lots o' morphing. Dolby Surround. (PG-13) 90 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $35. HBO–Savoy/Image.

HACKERS
1995. Johnny Lee Miller, Angelina Jolie, Fisher Stevens, Lorraine Bracco; dir. Iain Softley. Cyberpunks who stumble onto embezzlement scheme have to prove their innocence to the feds, beat a bad computer genius, and save the world from environmental disaster. Dolby Surround. (PG-13) 104 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $35. MGM/UA/Image.

KIDS
1995. Leo Fitzpatrick, Justin Pierce; dir. Larry Clark. Tell-it-how-it-is eye-opener or rock-and-roll exploitation flick? Your pick. Dolby Surround. (NR) 102 min. VHS priced for rental. LD full-frame $35. Vidmark.

LOVE AND HUMAN REMAINS
1995. Thomas Gibson, Mia Kirshner, Matthew Ferguson; dir. Denys Arcand. In Arcond's erotic, hilarious, and chilling thriller, two friends search for love but instead find a serial killer. Dolby Surround. (R) 100 min. VHS priced for rental. Unrated LD letterboxed (1.85:1). $40. Columbia TriStar.

THE MYSTERY OF RAMPO
1995. Naoto Takenaka, Michiko Hada, Masahiro Motoki; dir. Kazuyoshi Okuyama. A Japanese writer of banned erotic murder mysteries wanders into a world filled with the characters he's created—sensuous, beautiful, weird, and very Japanese. Dolby Digital Surround, subtitled. (NR) 101 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $40. Evergreen/Image.

***The Usual Suspects'* Byrne, Pollak**

MURIEL'S WEDDING
1995. Toni Collett, Bill Hunter, Rachel Griffiths; P.J. Hogan. An ugly duckling gets a makeover and has mating on her mind. Dolby Stereo. (R) 105 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $40. Miramax/Image.

POCAHONTAS
1995. Voices of Mel Gibson, Irene Bedard, Linda Hunt; dirs. Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg. Historical inaccuracy is overshadowed by Disney's winning way with animation; lovable animals, beautiful humans, and a hit-filled soundtrack carry the day. Dolby Surround. (G) 81 min. VHS only, $27. Disney.

SAFE
1995. Julianne Moore, James LeGros, Peter Friedman; dir. Todd Haynes. A housewife with an immune disorder must take a journey—both geographical and spiritual—to find treatment. Dolby Surround. (R) 119 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $40. Columbia TriStar.

THE SECRET OF ROAN INISH
1995. Mick Lally, Eileen Colgfan, John Lynch; dir. John Sayles. A Celtic myth about seal people begins to come true for a little girl in Ireland. Dolby Surround. (PG) 102 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $35. Columbia TriStar.

UNDER SIEGE 2: DARK TERRITORY
1995. Steven Seagal, Eric Bogosian, Katherine Heigl; dir. Geoff Murphy. Seagal cooks again as the Navy Seal chef who saves the world. Dolby Surround. (R) 100 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $35. Warner.

UNZIPPED
1995. Isaac Mizrahi, Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford; dir. Douglas Keeve. A frank and amusing documentary about Isaac Mizrahi, a celebrity in the wild world of fashion design. Dolby Stereo. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.66:1) $40. Miramax/Image.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS
1995. Stephen Baldwin, Gabriel Byrne, Chazz Palminteri, Kevin Pollak, Kevin Spacey, Benico Del Torro ; dir. Bryan Singer. Five criminals attempt to pull off the heist of a lifetime; a swell psychological thriller with a winning ensemble. Dolby Surround. (R) 106 min. VHS priced for rental. LD letterboxed (1.85:1) $35. Polygram. —*Josef Krebs*

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any idea of what you're talking about?" "No," she replies. "Do I sound like I do?" —*Mike Mettler*

SHOWGIRLS

SHORT AND SWEET: *SHOWGIRLS* (MGM/UA; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40) is as bad as everyone says it is. The virtually talentless Elizabeth Berkeley stars as a troubled twentysomething who escapes her past by hitching a ride to Las Vegas. She's a dancer, not a stripper—or so she tells everyone she meets there. But the joke's on her because everyone in Nevada—especially director Paul Verhoeven—knows she's just a stripper. And for all the hype about its NC-17 rating, *Showgirls* isn't sexy at all and doesn't even have any raw sex to sell—just a lot of angry, topless, gyrating women. After a while, you hardly even notice they're nude. This is the movie's most unforgivable conceit: It only pretends to deliver the goods. Amazingly, a cleaned-up version can also be found at your video store. The only surprise is that they don't keep these *Showgirls*-Lites under a rock. —*KK*

LABELS FOR LESS

COLUMBIA TRISTAR DELIVERS A CLASSIC SIDney Poitier double bill of *To Sir With Love* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* ($25 each), John Singleton's *Higher Learning* ($20) and *Poetic Justice* ($15), and *Mississippi Masala* and *Zebrahead* ($15 each). Fox Lorber offers three subtitled sell-thrus from Eric Rohmer—*Claire's Knee*, *Chloe in the Afternoon*, and *The Official Story*—as well as Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Junior*, *Twins*, *Kindergarten Cop*, *Conan the Barbarian*, and *Conan the Destroyer*, along with *Making Mr. Right*, *China Moon*, *Playmaker*, *No Way Out*, and *The Mean Season* (all $15 each). MGM/UA drives *Shaft*, *Shaft in Africa*, *Shaft's Big Score*, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, and *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* ($15 each). MGM/UA is thinking Valentine's Day with *True Love*, *The Russia House*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*,

Twins' Schwarzenegger, DeVito

Not Without My Daughter, *Clambake* ($10 each), and *Speechless* ($20). Kino comes out with *Daughters of the Dust* ($20) and three music documentaries from director Robert Mugge—*Saxophone Colossus: Sonny Rollins*, *The Gospel According to Al Green*, and *The Return of Ruben Bladés*, and *Symphony in Riffs: Benny Carter and The Last of the Blues Devils* ($25 each). Turn to Columbia TriStar for *The Little Women Gift Set* ($30) and *Legends of the Fall* ($20). New Line ends with *Death and the Maiden*, *Embrace of the Vampire*, *Bitter Moon* ($20 each), *Poison Ivy*, *Blink*, and *The Rapture* ($15 each). —*JK*

THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD

THE MAGIC IN *THE INDIAN IN THE CUPboard* (Columbia TriStar; VHS, $23, CLV disc, $35) is never questioned by the children who are touched by it, and this film's greatest strength is that it lets us share their innocent conviction. We aren't given the means to understand the mysterious cupboard, which transforms any toys that are put into it into living beings, but only the stoniest viewer will be able to resist *Indian*'s wonderful story of love, spiritual growth, and humanity. Omri (Hal Scardino), a lad growing up in Manhattan in (imagine!) a normal nuclear family, receives the castoff cupboard as a birthday gift. When he inserts a toy Indian and locks it momentarily, the brave (played by a Native American who goes by the name of Litefoot) springs to frightened life, apparently plucked from an alternate reality. Omri helps his new friend Little Bear set up housekeeping, then shows him off to a friend, who insists on bringing a cowpoke (David Keith) to rip-roaring life. Fortunately, the deft touch of director Frank Oz leaves no room for sermonizing in this tale about resolving mindless prejudices. *Indian* is full of surprising moments (including a great jack-in-the-box fright), and it'll entertain every family, nuclear or not. —*AW*

SMOKE

SMOKE (MIRAMAX/IMAGE; VHS, PRICED for rental, CLV disc, $40) is such a delightful group effort that having a plot almost seems superfluous. Wayne Wang's film, set in and around a New York City cigar store, is mainly made up of a series of stories told by the store owner (Harvey Keitel) and a customer (William Hurt) who happens to be a

novelist. Sometimes the camera is happy to watch and listen to the narrator, sometimes it enters into the tale, and sometimes it wanders off to see what one of the minor characters (Forest Whitaker, Stockard Channing, and Harold Perrineau) is up to. The relaxed, almost rambling style gradually begins to coalesce into a meditation on a serious subject: the dissolution of family unity, and the community's role in overcoming this loss. This is very much the case with *Smoke* itself—the film gives a sense of belonging to a much bigger family. —*JK*

BURNT BY THE SUN

BURNT BY THE SUN (COLUMBIA TRIStar; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $40), the worthy recipient of the 1994 Oscar for Best Foreign Film, takes place in 1936, at the dacha of Colonel Sergei Kotov, an idolized hero of the Soviet revolution. He, his young wife, their small daughter, and their eccentric in-laws enjoy a happy, hectic summer holiday, and the proceedings are shot in radiant sunlight and lush colors. We understand early on that this is the last happy day the family will know; the arrival of the wife's old flame signals not betrayal but the shadow of Stalin, the "sun" of the revolution, who can't bear it when light shines from anyone else. Nikita Mikhalkov (who also does an impressive turn as Kotov) directs this lyric tragedy in an understated manner that makes the climax all the more shattering.

—*Sol Louis Siegel*

AMATEUR

AS THE TITLE IMPLIES, THE CHARACters in this slack thriller are not quite up to the job: A porn star, her cruel pimp, a nymphomaniac, and two hired assassins might make for great film noir or French poetic realism, but in the hands of director Hal Hartley, they're a joke: His assassins—ex-accountants—discuss cellular phones. The nympho is a virgin just out of a nunnery whose attempts at porn-writing read like bad poetry. The pimp has amnesia and keeps apologizing for whatever it was he did but can't remember. *Amateur* (Columbia TriStar;

***Amateur*'s Simonds, Lowensohn**

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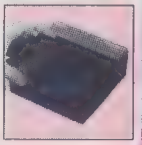

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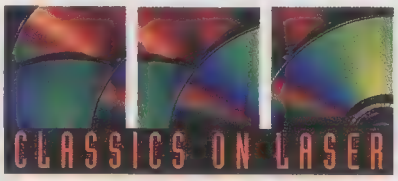
VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $35) is Hartley's shot at the traditional noir study of the meaning of identity. But while *Pulp Fiction* or Godard's *Breathless* manage to mix action, bedroom existentialism, oddly natural dialogue, and flashy film style just right, *Amateur* takes a step too far and loses the tension needed to drive the movie along. (And kudos to the fine acting by Elina Lowensohn and David Simonds.) —*JK*

❑ WITTGENSTEIN
❑ BLUE

WITTGENSTEIN (KINO; VHS, $80) AND *Blue* (Kino; VHS, $25) are Derek Jarman's last films before his AIDS-related death in 1993. In *Wittgenstein*, Jarman uses humor, uninhibited honesty, and a disrespectful tone to release the philosopher Wittgenstein from the two-dimensional confines of historical greatness, thereby making his ideas more accessible.

Blue, in contrast, is the director's account of the final stages of his own life, in which he faced the gradual onset of blindness. The viewer is presented with a blank blue screen while an actor's voice recounts the filmmaker's fantasies, fears, and contemplations about dying. The inescapably blank screen conveys Jarman's loss in a way that simple audio commentary or images of any kind never could. Subtle humor abounds; the film is shot in widescreen and Technicolor. In the end, *Blue* ably answers Jarman's resonating question—"If I lose half my sight, will I lose half my vision?" —*JK*



DO THE RIGHT THING

VOYAGER'S CRITERION COLLECTION shows it knows right from wrong with *Do the Right Thing* (1989; CLV/CAV, $125), Spike Lee's masterpiece about the simmering racial tensions that threaten to explode a neighborhood on a sweltering summer day in New York City. Hot colors play an important role in this groundbreaking film, and LDC's magnificent transfer—supervised by Lee and director of photography Ernest Dickerson—handles them deftly in the original 1.85:1 aspect ratio. Never has a film "felt" so oppressive. The booming Dolby Surround soundtrack likewise earns plaudits, fanning the film's foundation of pulsating anger, frustration, and despair. The acting—by Lee, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Danny Aiello, John Turturro, Giancarlo Esposito, John Savage, Robin Harris, Rosie Perez, Martin Lawrence, and Samuel L. Jackson—is uniformly flawless. Extras include adulating liner notes by Roger Ebert, behind-the-scenes photos, trailers and teasers, informative and engaging audio commentary by Lee, Dickerson, and rapper Chuck D, an hourlong documentary on the making of the movie, and the director's own home videos of rehearsals and production. An up-to-date Lee filmography, utilizing stills and clips, completes this hefty package—a must for any laserphile. —*Mel Neuhaus*

Pizza boxing: *Thing*'s Lee, Aiello

THE WILD BUNCH

THE STUDIO HATCHET JOB DONE ON *The Wild Bunch*, Sam Peckinpah's legendary 1969 Western, is also the stuff of legend: The director completed his epic, screened it for the press, then went on vacation in Hawaii. While he was away, the studio cut 20-odd minutes out of the film without telling him—not to sanitize the movie's outrageous violence, but merely to shorten it so theaters could squeeze out an extra screening per day. Warner restored this classic movie a long time ago, but the current video release (VHS, priced for rental, CLV discs, $40) marks the first

CONTINUED ON PAGE 76

MULTIMEDIA

FAST FORWARD

Hit Record

REPRESENTATIVES FROM the recording industry are fuming now that prices for CD-ROM recorders are approaching the $1,000 mark—the figure that's widely quoted as critical for mass consumer acceptance. Hewlett–Packard has announced a model with a suggested retail price of $1,295 and a street price of $999; Pinnacle Micro has a recorder that's slightly more expensive, and Creative Labs hopes to get a comparable model on shelves soon. The issue, as always, is digital recording's potential for copyright violations. The forecast: threats, verbal dogfights, and legal action.

—Bill Wolfe

Net Lite

AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO the complexity and high cost of loaded multimedia PCs, several manufacturers—including IBM and Oracle—say they're developing inexpensive "network computers" that'll serve as Internet gateways. The manufacturers are positioning these new components as appliances: While they'll offer limited memory (Oracle has specified 4 MB of DRAM and a similar amount of flash memory), they'll provide email service and access to basic Net and Web features—and be as easy to use as a TV set. Prices may be as low as $500. The idea hasn't met with universal acceptance in the industry, however; Microsoft's Bill Gates was quoted as branding it a "stupid idea," and others suggest that next-generation TV sets could offer the same features. *—BW*

Game Ball

WHO'S THE BADDEST electronic football player in the land? Electronic Arts and Catapult Entertainment have teamed up to find out. Starting last November, virtual-gridiron greats across the country began to play EA's *John Madden NFL '96* digital football head-to-head via standard telephone lines; Catapult's XBand Network lets Sega Genesis and Nintendo Super NES consoles link up via modem—and their owners compete in real-time. When this All-Madden Team is selected, look for the New York Jets to be ready with contract offers. *—Marc Horowitz*

New Kid

SONY HAS ANNOUNCED that they'll be offering consumer-grade PCs for sale in the United States this fall. Details are scarce, but the PCs will include Intel processors and motherboards; the goal will be a PC that's as easy to use as a TV set. One thing's certain: Sony's experience with display devices, audio technology, and CD-ROM players should prove handy in the multimedia arena—and a DVD-equipped Sony PC seems a sure bet. *—BW*

Soft Touched

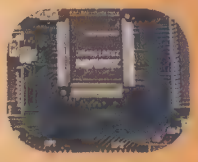
THE INTERNET AND THE World Wide Web have inspired multimedia companies to remake the software landscape. The Net's TCP/IP communications spec and the Web's hypertext markup language (HTML) prove that computers of all stripes can speak to one another and that all types of data can easily be shared among them. So why not software? And why not mini programs that can be accessed temporarily—and as easily as email, for a small fee—when specialized applications raise specific needs? Netscape (developer of the *Navigator* Web browser), Sun Microsystems (developer of the Java programming language), and small software developers around the world are exploring the notion of software-on-demand; expensive and memory-guzzling "bloatware" (huge, relatively ungainly software packages like *Windows 95*) are the target they'd like to make obsolete. Microsoft won't take this challenge lying down, of course. The forecast: You know the drill. *—BW*

ON THE INSIDE

NEW TECH 70

SOFTWIRE 70

SHORTWARE 72



ENHANCE CABLE TECHNOLOGY's SoundJack Jr. ($30) and SoundJack Sr. ($25) audio controllers put sound-card volume control in the palm of your hand. Eliminating the step-by-step delays inherent in setting volume levels through software interfaces, the SoundJack family lets you adjust levels simply by spinning a control wheel. Both versions plug directly into a sound card and are equipped with two headphone inputs and one speaker input; Jr. comes bundled with multiplatform *Club Kidsoft* CD-ROMs. *Circle 128 on reader service card*

NEW TECH

MULTIMEDIA LABS' TC-1490-7SUB multimedia audio system ($299) consists of a pair of two-way speakers, a bass module, and an amp that's rated to deliver 40 watts rms per channel. The amp includes a five-band graphic equalizer, a built-in microphone, mic mixing circuitry, and front-panel inputs for headphones and an external mic. The 9.25-inch-high two-way speakers are magnetically shielded and feature Kapton voice coils and 15-ounce woofer magnets. The bass module has a 6.5-inch woofer and measures 14.5 x 7.75 x 9.5 inches (h/w/d); response is said to extend down to 35 Hz. *Circle 129 on reader service card*

SOFTWIRE

DOOM: SPECIAL PLAYSTATION EDITION

IN THE GAME INDUSTRY, TECHNOLOGY races along like a caffeine-pumped trucker, and yesterday's groundbreaking title is today's hand-me-down. So with an aggrieved "ho-hum" I greeted the news that *Doom* had—following forays onto every other system known to Man—alighted on Sony's hot PlayStation. Shows what I know. This version (Williams; $65) *rocks*—it's easily the best console conversion of *Doom* and one of the best PlayStation games I've tried.

Credit goes to PlayStation's precise controls, the dynamic and smooth graphics, and heart-pounding audio and sound effects. Williams plays the title to PlayStation's strengths, and has added enough twists and turns to surprise even the most jaded *Doom* fanatic. You get an enhanced version of the original PC game, with new levels and enemies from the sequel, along with *Doom II*, which also sports new levels. Three modes of play let you go it alone, team up with a partner, or engage an opponent head-to-head. This *Doom* even manages to best the PC version on two fronts: PlayStation's precise controller makes ops like shooting on the run and jumping much easier to execute. And because PlayStation connects to a TV rather than to a PC monitor, you don't have to jump through hoops to enjoy *Doom* on a big-screen TV and a powerful surround-sound system. Try running *Doom* through your home theater—if the experience doesn't knock you out, you're beyond our help.

—*James K. Willcox*

ROLLING STONES: VOODOO LOUNGE

THOUGH ROCK-AND-ROLL CD-ROMS are still evolving as an artform, a basic formula has been established: Supply a 3-D environment and let the ROMmer roam, discovering music videos, live and backstage footage, and band interviews—and throw in a bit of unreleased music to tantalize the most devoted fans. Virgin Interactive's *Rolling Stones: Voodoo Lounge* ($50) mostly sticks to the script, inviting you to wander a grand Southern mansion, enjoy "on-stage-perspective" videos as well as some acoustic blues from guitarist Ron Wood, and view the world through the "Jagger-Cam." But *Voodoo* also deviates from the norm in one important way: It provides in-depth tributes to the musicians that inspired the band. Keith Richards explains his love for Robert Johnson, Elmore James, and other blues giants, rare footage of artists like Howlin' Wolf and T-Bone Walker is included, and specific book-and-CD suggestions are made for those seeking to discover the essence of the blues. Talk about satisfaction. (Mac disc)

—*Ken Korman*

NHL '96

IF YOU THINK SPORTS VIDEOGAMES are aimed at Nintendo junkies just out of diapers, you're a stranger to Electronic Arts' mind-boggling series of hockey games, recently updated as *NHL '96* ($60). Though all *NHL* formats feature state-of-the-art artificial intelligence, the CD editions have better graphics and more features than the 16-bit versions. EA's, um, goal was to maintain a realistic feel and flow of the game as the user switches from controlling one on-screen player to another—and their success deserves Stanley Cup-size kudos. The computer, meanwhile, keeps all of the other players moving and reacting in true-to-life form. When it all comes together—as it usually does in an EA game—it's poetry in motion; you can even control details like ice texture and player shadows. By popular demand, the politically incorrect fighting option that was eliminated from last year's version has been restored to '96—this is hockey, after all. God save

the queen. (Sega Genesis, Super NES, Sony PlayStation, MPC discs) —*KK*

THE MULTIMEDIA ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SCIENCE FICTION

THE INTERACTIVE REFERENCE WORK IS surely one of the best uses yet devised for CD-ROM, and those that zero in on a single finite subject are almost always the ones that work best. So what could be better suited for multimedia than the world of science fiction? Based on the Hugo Award-winning *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Grolier's *The Multimedia Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* ($60) builds on said volume's 1.2 million-word text with hundreds of videoclips, sound bites, and photographs. Hear Isaac Asimov discuss technology's role in society, explore broad topics like time travel and artificial intelligence, or just sit back and watch the original trailer for *The Blob*. Not surprisingly, the point of view is unmistakably nerdy—the entry on Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, for example, complains of alleged plot flaws while ignoring the film's larger artistic and visual triumphs. Whether you're a budding trekker or a hardcore cyberpunk, *Science Fiction* will take you to the next frontier. (Mac, MPC discs) —*KK*

FRANKENSTEIN: THROUGH THE EYES OF THE MONSTER

EVER HAD ONE OF THOSE MORNINGS where you woke up feeling like you died the night before and someone revived you by substituting other people's body parts? Okay, maybe you haven't, but Interplay's *Frankenstein: Through the Eyes of the Monster* ($50) makes the prospect seem real. The game opens with you prone on a slab, confused and clueless. Tim Curry plays the mad doctor, and his performance in *Congo* seems restrained in comparison; you're the hapless creature, and you have to find out how you got here and what's up with the doc. You do so by snooping around his lab, the nearby Tesler Coil room, and the endless, wonderfully gothic underground passages and secret chambers, all of which are depicted from your perspective. But be forewarned—you'll be on your own, and unless you have the inquiring mind and systematic approach of a scientist, you'll get nowhere slow and eventually end up wishing you were dead . . . again. (Windows, Mac discs) —*Josef Krebs*

THEATRE OF THE IMAGINATION: RADIO STORIES BY ORSON WELLES AND THE MERCURY THEATRE

THOUGH IT'S RARELY MORE INTERACtive than a music CD, Voyager's *Theatre of the Imagination* ($30) is a wonderful CD-ROM, and a must-have for Welles fans, theater-lovers, and anyone who likes getting lost in a good story. Visuals are kept to a minimum, though there are program notes, texts, and supplements. That leaves plenty of bits for 15 radio plays from the '30s and '40s, including *Rebecca* and a soliloquy from *Hamlet*. And then there's the audio extras, including an engrossing documentary on The Mercury Theatre, reminiscences from cast members, and a short recording of Joseph Cotton and Welles kidding around—it'll transport you right into *The Third Man*. (Windows/Mac disc) —*JK*

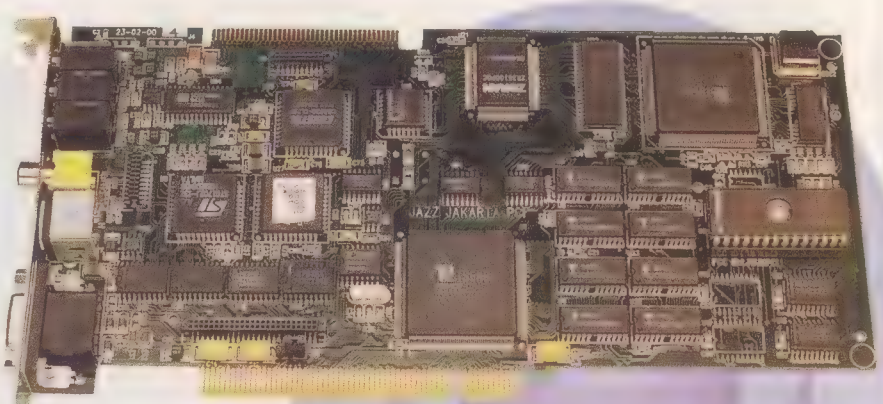
***Theatre of the Imagination*'s Orson Welles**

AIWA's SC-C77 multimedia speaker system ($110) has inputs for two sources and a level control that enables seamless, volume-stable mixes between the two. The C77 is powered by an integral amplifier that's rated to deliver 20 watts total. Each magnetically shielded 8.75-inch-tall enclosure houses a 4-inch full-range driver. Aiwa's Dynamic Super Linear Bass circuit is on hand to enhance bass performance. *Circle 130 on reader service card*

CREATIVE LABS' Performance 6X multimedia upgrade kit ($430) includes a 6X internal CD-ROM player, a Sound Blaster 32 Plug-and-Play sound card, two speakers, and a *big* bundle of software. The CD-ROM player's transfer rate is said to exceed 900 KBps; data access rate is given as 220 ms, and there's a 26-KB cache memory. The sound card offers EMU8000-based 32-voice wavetable music synthesis, a 3-D surround effect, and 16-bit stereo recording and playback. Supplied software titles include LucasArts' *Full Throttle*, InterPlay's *Cyberia Mission Norway*, and *Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopedia*. *Circle 131 on reader service card* ■

Jakarta of All Trades

Jazz Multimedia Jakarta Graphics Card



WHETHER YOU BOUGHT YOUR MULtimedia PC 10 months or 10 minutes ago, the hard fact is that you face obsolescence. Nowhere is this more true than with PC-based video. Over the last several months, CD-ROM publishers and hardware vendors have embraced video with MPEG-1 data reduction. Now a wave of CD-ROM titles, games, and movies using MPEG-1 video are hitting retail shelves. There's just one problem: Only the fastest Pentium-equipped PCs can play back MPEG video without dropping frames. You don't have to spring for a new PC to enjoy these cutting-edge apps, though—not if you opt for a graphics card like Jazz Multimedia's Jakarta, at least.

The Jakarta ($399) is pretty slick. It acts as a standard graphics accelerator card, speeding up *Windows* performance by handling common graphics operations on the card. It also plays back MPEG-1 video using a dedicated MPEG chip. That means your CPU won't be maxed out processing relatively complex MPEG-1 data streams—a situation that's likely to occur even if you're running with a sleek 120-MHz Pentium processor.

As PC add-in cards go, the Jakarta is unique. In addition to its talents as a *Windows* accelerator and MPEG-1 playback platform, the card can be upgraded to add a TV tuner, a video-capture card, and a module with an analog NTSC video output. Available in versions for PCI or VL bus systems, the Jakarta will run in virtually any 486 or Pentium system purchased over the last 2 years. And with its standard 2 MB of affordable DRAM memory, it can display 800 x 600 pixels with 16.7 million colors.

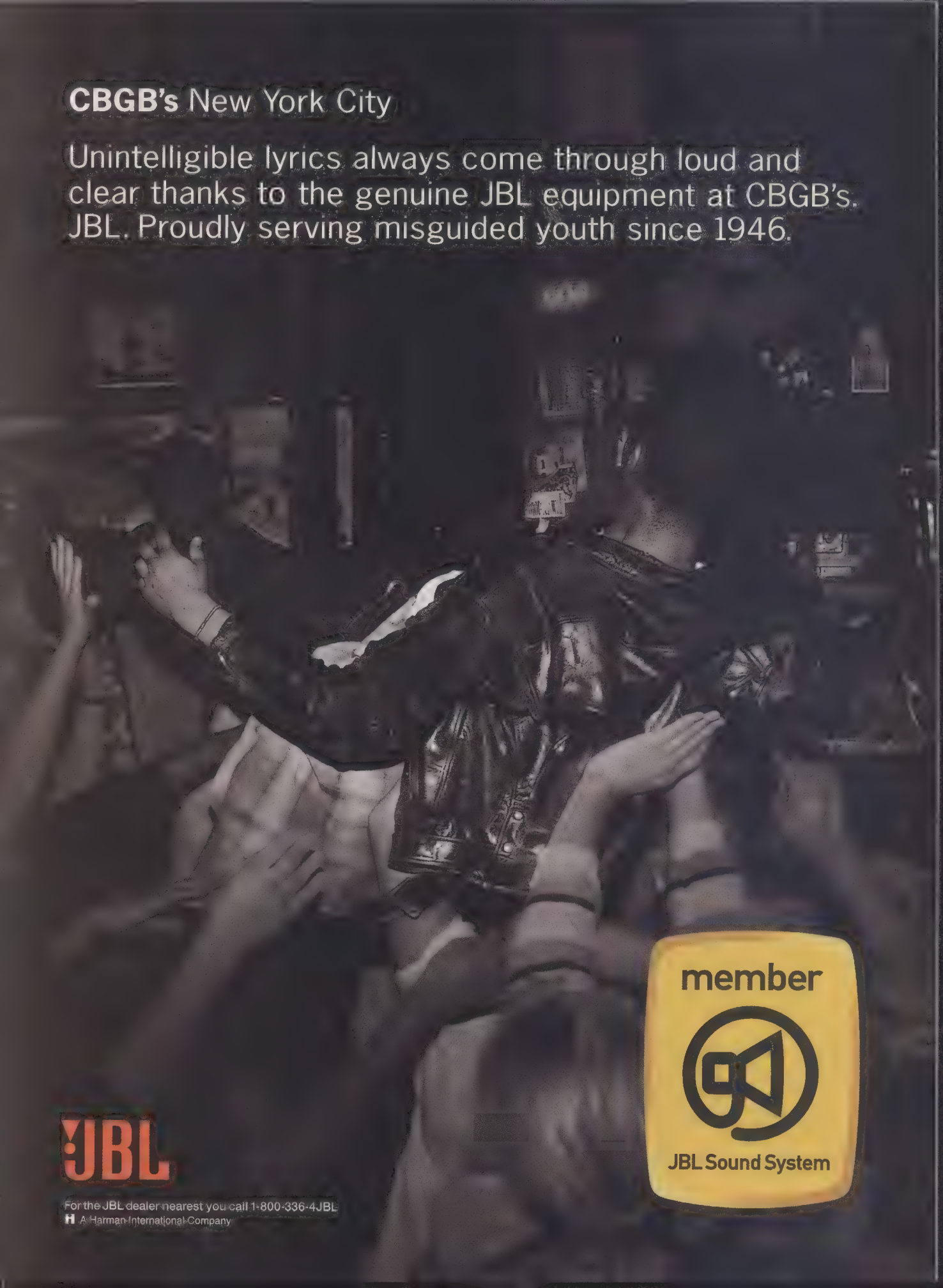
Jazz seems to have done its homework on the Jakarta. The card installed cleanly and quickly on my PCI- and *Windows 95*-based system, dodging a host of multimedia peripheral settings during setup. Once I ran through the three-disk install routine, my *Windows* desktop came right up. The documentation was well illustrated and laid out, with conservative step-by-step instructions, and the box includes software to let the card run under both *Windows 95* and *Windows 3.1*. The software interface was easy to use, making it a snap to use all of the card's capabilities.

And MPEG-1 video is the belle of the ball. The MPEG playback chip on the main board takes almost all of the work off of your PC's CPU, so you can play cycle-hungry games and titles and never lose a single frame of video. The clips I played from the bundled CD-ROM titles (Sumeria's nature set, which includes *Oceans Below*, *Wild Africa*, and *Space*) were sharp, smooth, and rich compared to other PC-based digital video.

Video aficionados know, of course, that MPEG-1 delivers video of about VHS quality. By definition, MPEG-1 video measures 352 x 240 pixels, which is a pretty small window if you're running at 1024 x 768 resolution. The bundled MPEG-1 player software lets you double the native resolution, but I found the results less than satisfying. The Jakarta attempts to average out pixel colors to lessen blockiness, but the aging hardware produced images that were somewhat pixelated and grainy. Still, it's a vast improvement over the tiny, flickering clips that have passed for video to date.

Unfortunately, the Jakarta is no graphics hotrod. I immediately noticed increased screen flicker compared to that produced by my everyday board, Diamond's Stealth 64 Video VRAM. The Jakarta also lagged behind the Stealth in basic graphics performance, particularly when I set the display to 16.7 million colors.

What the Jakarta does offer is an upgrade path. You can turn your PC into a high-powered TV set with the $149 Port of Entry add-in ISA board, which includes a TV tuner, video- and image-capture software, and inputs for S-Video, composite, and audio signals. The software lets you switch among various inputs and includes controls for changing and programming TV channels. The Projector lets you dish out what the Jakarta takes. This $119 module plugs into the side of the Jakarta board and provides an RGB-to-NTSC converter, enabling you to convert digital video into the TV- and VCR-friendly analog format. With both the Port of Entry and Projector boards installed, you can capture, edit, and write out to tape an entire video presentation edited on the PC. Clearly, Jazz's Jakarta is an intriguing card with many talents. It's your deal. —*Michael Desmond*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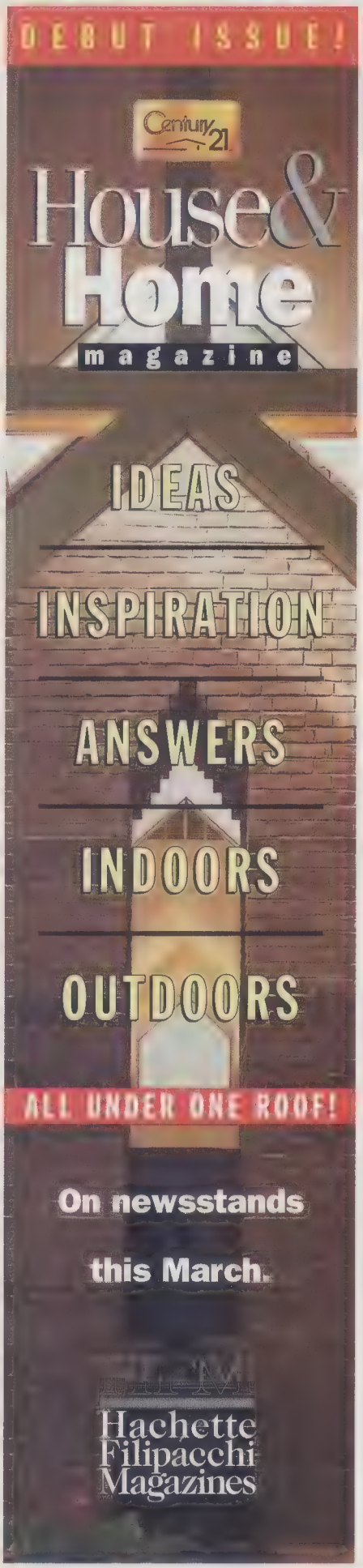

VIDEOTEST

JVC GR-SV7

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 58

tion was a notch below the best S-VHS and S-VHS-C cams, at 380 lines it's still far superior to regular VHS, VHS-C, or 8mm. Video signal-to-noise ratios were extremely good, indicating that the SV7 can record images with a minimum of visible picture noise. I confirmed this in hands-on testing, especially in low-light shooting with the AGC turned off. Our tests also revealed that, in some ways, this cam actually works better at the slower EP speed; SP is still best overall, of course.

On the audio side, the SV7 is equipped with VHS Hi-Fi stereo sound, which performed very well at both speeds. Frequency response, dynamic range, and distortion (using the line input/output jacks) were comparable to those of good Hi-Fi VCRs. The cam has mic and headphone jacks, but lacks manual level controls. A selector in the PLAYBACK menu lets you choose between Hi-Fi and normal (linear) audio tracks. A tiny built-in speaker lets you listen to tape playback; speaker volume is controlled by two pushbuttons.

The mic and headphone jacks are the only jacks on the cam. All other A/V hookups are made at the supplied CU-V602 junction box. It's compact, attaches securely, and offers a single set of S-Video and A/V jacks as well as a switch that determines whether these jacks will serve as inputs or outputs. Another jack (cryptically labeled PRINTER on our test sample) functions as a video-monitor input to the LCD.

The box also offers two additional mini jacks labeled REMOTE and EDIT. The former is designed for use with the optional RM-V20U wired remote control, which provides interval recording, VISS search capability, and operation of many other functions from behind the cam (where you can't use the IR remote). The latter is for use with a compatible JVC-brand VCR, for synchronized pause release on both player and recorder. Surprisingly, JVC doesn't include their Random Assemble Edit feature on the SV7.

The supplied wireless remote offers in-camera video-insert and audio-dub editing, both of which are available only via the remote. As with all VHS Hi-Fi equipment, replacing the video with insert editing also replaces the Hi-Fi audio tracks, though it leaves the linear audio track unchanged.

SNAPSHOT SEARCH is an extra editing feature, and it's useful when copying to a JVC-brand VCR. The SV7 will copy only the snapshot recordings for a period of 3 seconds each.

And then there's the MESSAGE mode. Activated from the power switch, it transforms the cam into a video message center: A menu appears on-screen with instructions for leaving an audio/video message; it also indicates how many messages there are and provides a means of playing them back.

Battery life is 40 minutes according to JVC. In practice, I found it to be slightly less, probably due to my predilection for using both viewfinders simultaneously as well as my fondness for recording in short bursts and making frequent adjustments. The supplied Ni-Cd battery can be replaced with optional larger, heavier batteries that, according to JVC, extend runtime to 85 or 115 minutes.

Like most S- and VHS-C-format camcorders, the SV7 comes with a motorized cassette adaptor that lets you play its mini-sized S-VHS-C cassettes on a full-size VCR. If you have an S-VHS VCR, simply use the S-VHS recording mode; if your VCR is a regular VHS model and you want to use it, and not the cam, for playback, you need to turn the S-VHS recording feature off or simply use regular, less expensive VHS-C tape. Slide switches on the back panel let you select recording speed and tape length.

THOUGH JVC'S GR-SV7 DOESN'T DELIVER every last bit of picture quality the S-VHS format has to offer, many people will find that it more than compensates with a unique easy-to-use design and lots of special features. And make no mistake: Picture quality is very respectable, sound quality is excellent, and the black-and-white backup viewfinder and LCD sunshade are terrific additions. Bottom line: The SV7 is a lot of fun to shoot with, and it's a genuine innovation. ■

ComputAbility Since 1982 800-554-9949

Internet http://www.computability.com

DISCONTINUED SPECIALS

	List Price	Sale Price
PRO EDITING EQUIPMENT		
Sony EVO-9650	$6,700.00	$2,799
Sony EVO-9800A	$6,450.00	$3,999
Future Video 3300 (Mac/Dos)	$995.00	$699.00
TELEVISIONS		
Mitsubishi CS-27403 27" w/picture in picture	$849.00	$699.00
Mitsubishi CS-20201 20" stereo	$499.00	$299.00
VIDEO GAMES		
JVC XEYE (Sega Compatible)	$399.00	$99.00
CD PLAYERS		
Pioneer PD-DM502	$199.95	$99.95
Pioneer PD-DM552	$249.95	$119.95
A/V RECEIVERS		
Pioneer VSX-D2S	$1299.95	$999.95
Pioneer VSX-502	$399.95	$229.95
HOME THEATRE SPEAKERS		
Sony SA-VA 1 (w/built in amp)	$599.00	$499.00
Canon (2 Speaker & Subwoofer)	$499.96	$199.95
Canon SV-15 (2 Speakers)	$249.95	$99.95

REFURBISHED CAMCORDERS, VCR'S AND LASER DISCS (See Bottom Right)

THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS!

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 68

with the all-important widescreen picture intact. (The LD's Dolby Surround AC-3 soundtrack is an unexpected bonus.) The violence no longer seems unusual, but the story—which involves old-fashioned Western outlaws trying to face changing times at the start of the 20th century—has held up well. Credit stars William Holden, Robert Ryan, Ernest Borgnine, and Ben Johnson, all of whom deliver robust performances. In retrospect, it seems that these actors may have sensed that Hollywood's Golden Age had also drawn to a close, just like the old West. The loss is ours. —*KK*

EASY RIDER

COLUMBIA TRISTAR HAS JUST RE-leased an awesome remaster of *Easy Rider* (1969; CLV disc, $60), Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda's anti-Establishment classic. Besides charting disparities in American values, this low-budget depiction of two hippie bikers "lookin' for adventure" changed the cinematic landscape; ironically, it also became one of the industry's first mega-million-dollar superhits. And it shot Jack Nicholson, in an extended cameo, to international fame. The Sony transfer and pressing accurately render Laszlo Kovac's mind-expanding 1.85:1 compositions and warm pastel color scheme. Extras include incisive and occasionally amusing audio commentary by Hopper, Fonda, and production manager Paul Lewis. —*MN*

BELLE DE JOUR

UNSEEN IN THE UNITED STATES FOR 25 years, *Belle de Jour* (1967; Image/The Criterion Collection; VHS, priced for rental, CLV disc, $50) has finally been restored and rereleased. Director Luis Buñuel takes us into the world of Severine (the enchanting Catherine Deneuve), a beautiful young Frenchwoman. Bored with her loving husband, Severine leaves her suburban home every afternoon to work in a Paris brothel, where she is compelled to accept any man who chooses her. Blurring the lines between imagination and reality, the subtitled *Belle* keeps you guessing as to what is really "happening" and what occurs only in Severine's mind. (You'll probably need to watch it at least twice in order to catch everything.) More sophisticated than shocking, *Belle* is a perfect date movie for adults, sparking both speculation and fantasy. —*M.Faust*

THE CHAPLIN MUTUALS

THE NEWLY REMASTERED *THE CHAPLIN Mutuals* box set (Image; CLV discs, $100) marks both a celebration and a headache for hardcore Charlie Chaplin buffs. While it's the fourth time these classic "two-reelers" have been released on LD in less than a decade, compiler David Shepard has performed major digital reconstruction by using long-lost negatives; his work lends these films their clearest, sharpest presentation yet. A few errors do creep in, such as a repeated shot in *The Cure* and some missing footage, but this handsome collection is still a must for diehard Chaplin fans. —*Bruce Lawton*

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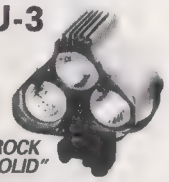
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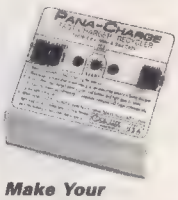
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HSU-560	Call	HSU-760	Call

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VL-H 400U	749.95	VLE-33U	Call
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VR-ISPN (Waterproof Housing)	399.95
VR-1MCN (Stereo Microphone)	114.95
VR-33 ABN (A V-In Out Jack Pack)	29.95
VR-410 ABN (A V-In Out Jack Pack 450	35.95
VR-WC37C (Wide Angle Conversion Lens)	89.95
VR-TC37U (Telephoto Conversion Lens)	104.95
VR-U30 RF (RF Converter)	38.95
VR-IAPN (Auto Pan Head)	279.95

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VR-410-BFN			59.95

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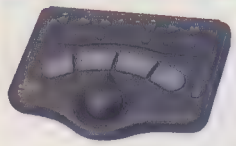

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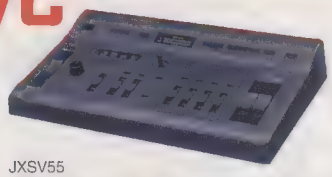
SALE $129.95

Also available: AB1 accessory bracket $10.00



JXSV55
Ultimate S-VHS Production Center
Special Effects Generator - 16 wipe patterns & fade to 8 colors. High resolution Color Processor with joystick control. Video Enhancer for sharper images. Hi-Fi Stereo 3 channel audio mixer. 2 inputs/ 2 outputs plus switchable monitor out. Works with all formats, including S-VHS/Hi8
SALE $399.00

JXS300
Remote Control A/V S-VHS Switcher
3 S-VHS/A/V in & out
Y/C separator Video amp with 800 lines resolution
SALE $229.00

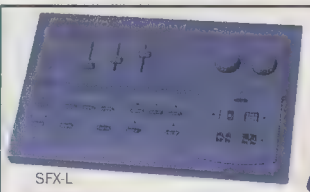
JXS700
Deluxe Remote Control S-VHS Switcher
7 in, 4 out plus monitor out Y/C separator Video amp with 960 lines resolution 2 signal paths for simultaneous dubbing or viewing A/V processor loops
SALE $449.00

sima

SFX-M
The Digital Video Effects You Want at the Price You Can Afford!
Dazzle your friends and family with Hollywood type effects. Sima's fabulous new SFX-M gives you all of these digital video effects at a very affordable price:
- Studio style transitions and effects
- Real blue screen chroma key
- 100's of digital video effects. Create different, exciting combinations with STILL, 3 STROBE SPEEDS, 2 PAINT LEVELS, 3 MOSAIC LEVELS & COLOR NEGATIVE
- 100's of colorful wipes and fades
- Easy to set-up and fun to use
- 2 inputs/outputs with separate monitor jacks.
- Works with all formats including S-VHS and Hi8.
- Built-in stereo audio mixer.

Introductory Special $599.00

CHROMA KEY



SFX-L
Automatic Control L Editor & Special Effects Generator
Automatically edits your videos w/color fades & wipes & audio mixing. Preprogram Edit Decision List w/ 23 scenes.On-screen display lists the in & out, transitions & elapsed time. Requires Sony or equiv. Control L camcorder. S-VHS/Hi8 compatible.
SALE $179.00 (reg $249.00)

SCW
Color Titler w/ Special Title Effects
Put your titles into motion & create unique Hollywood effects. Full size keyboard, S-VHS & Hi8 compatibility, 12 page memory,8 colors, 4 sizes,outlining & boxing.
SALE $199.00 (reg $249.00)

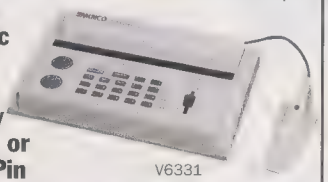
SED-EM
Home Video Editor with Enhancer & Audio Mixer
The new Sima EditMaster easily adjusts color intensity, tint and brightness and a split screen mode allows for comparison. Delete and rearrange scenes with black or white fades. Stereo audio mixer, mic and cables included. S-VHS/Hi8 compatible.
SALE $149.00 (reg $199.00)

AMBICO

V6350
Color Titler
SALE $149.00 (reg.$179.00)

Superimpose titles over live video or on B&W background. Features 8 colors, 2 fonts, 4 sizes & 3 borders. Titles can wipe in/out, scroll up/down, crawl & flash. 10 page memory.

Universal Automatic Editor works with Sony Control L or Pana. 5-Pin



V6331

Choose and rearrange up to 191 scenes. On-screen Edit Decision List displays sequences, in and out points and transition choices (fade or cut). Built-in enhancer.
$179.00

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NoMEM™ BATTERY — NO MEMORY CAMCORDER BATTERIES

No memory batteries offer a full charge everytime! Carefree, no worry! Available for all major brands. **$49.95**

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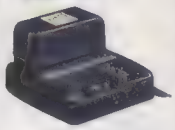
BCR262 Automatically reconditions & charges two 6v batteries, incl. NoMEM. Plus-4 level LED battery tester & Power Supply. AC/DC **$79.95**



BCR262

Also Available: BCR10 Charger/ Reconditioner for 9.6, 10, & 12v batteries, AC/DC **$79.95**

LED65

NoMEM Camcorder Battery Belt Packs w/ LED
LED65 6.5AH Runs camcorder approx. 5 hrs. **$69.95**
LED100 10AH Runs camcorder approx. 7 hrs. **$99.95**
Also available: LP650 6.5AH 12v **$69.95**

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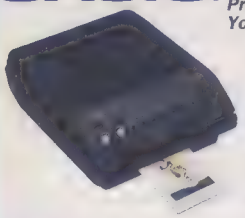
Color Video Printer
Print Images Right Off Your TV Screen!



VG100

Print beautiful, clear images from home movies, video tapes & TV shows. You can even make stickers, cards & posters of the video images! Take a photo of anything on screen, easily. Make a photo of a favorite scene from your party or wedding or make an album of prints from videos of the kids!

SALE $399.00 (reg $599.00)

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New!
Memory Free Nicad Battery with Lifetime Warranty
RB70UL High capacity (2000mAh) gives up to 2 hrs. for 8mm & VHS-C camcorders from Sony, Pana, JVC and Sharp. Features 3 stage LED indicators. **$49.95**

Also Available: RB80UL-Same as above with ultra high capacity (2700 mAh) **$69.95**

RB-70UL

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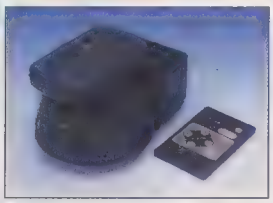
CZ-200A
Cordless VideoLight with Auto Sensor, Zoom & Tilt Head. Includes battery & charger **$69.95**
RL-20 compact light **$29.95**



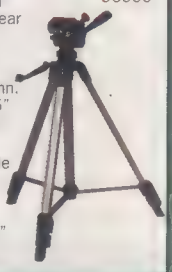
Remote Control Auto Pan/Tilt Head

AP-200W

Mount your camcorder on Sunpak's pan head, place on tripod & get in the action with everyone else! Infra-red signal controls pan & tilt plus lens zoom & record/pause of Sony, JVC, Hitachi & Canon camcorders. Powered by 6v battery (not included) **$149.00**
RS200W Optional 20' remote sensor cord **$24.95**

SLIK

U6000



Includes ultra-smooth fluid pan head, gear drive & positive elevation center column. Opens to 55" **$29.95**

Also available U8000 Deluxe model opens to 59" **$49.95**

DESK TOP VIDEO

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Plug, Play, & Edit
No Boards to Install
Works in Windows
Includes VideoDirector Suite

AVer Video Editor

The World's 1st PlugPlay & Edit System!
Just plug into any comm port, load the software and start editing! Here's what you can do:

- Edit and arrange scenes from any Control L or IR camcorder
- View your video on your VGA monitor
- Capture Picons and make a graphical timeline edit decision list
- Create awesome titles and transitions using Curtain Call
- AVer Video Editor superimposes your titles over the video footage automatically.

Video Director

Curtain Call Titles

Turns your PC or Mac, camcorder & VCR into a complete editing system. Choose the shots, drag & drop into order and "Make Tape" for assembly.

$499.00

Also available: VGA Aver Pro Genlock Card. Replaces your VGA card and lets you superimpose titles and graphics over your video. Includes Curtain Call titling software. **$499.00**

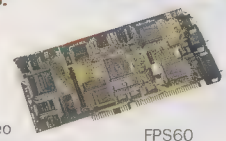
AVerKey3 Hi-Resolution Scan Converter

Display VGA output from your computer to any TV or VCR! Provides VGA, composite, S-VHS & RGB output with resolutions up to 800x600. True Plug & Play. Remote control operation lets you zoom & pan to any area of the screen, plus freeze. **Powerful presentation tool.**

AVerKey PC **$299.00** AVerKey Mac/PC **$399.00**

FAST
The Art of Digital Video.

S-VHS Hi-Res Non-Linear Editing System!



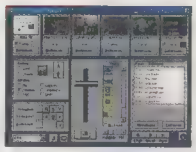
FPS60

Now you can create hi-resolution S-VHS quality video using your PC. This integrated single board solution captures video at 30 frames and 60 fields per second for incredible picture quality. The video in a window technology lets you capture, preview and edit your video using your SVGA monitor!

The world's easiest capture card to set up!
FPS60 is the first video capture card with auto optimization software! You just play in some video, click on optimize and FPS60 does the rest. It makes several video capture samples and then configures your software for optimum performance. Complete bundle includes the top rated Adobe Premiere 4.0 LE, Photoshop LE, Simply 3D Animation Software and Xing MPEG Encoder software

SALE $799.00

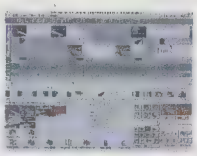
Movie Machine Pro



Turn your PC into a state-of-the-art digital video mixer & titler for under $500
18 A/B roll video effects, Chroma & Luma keying & more! Built in TV tuner. Framegrabber import titles & graphics from any Windows application & overlay them on video.

ON SALE $399.00

Fast Video Machine Lite



A/B Roll Editing Suite w/ Edit Control and DVE Effects!!
Fully integrated system blows away higher priced component editing suites. Everything you need in one ISA card. Can be used for A/B roll, A/X roll & audio/video split editing. Supports LANC (Sony Control L), Control M (Pana 5 pin). The ultimate multi-source editing system, supports VITC, RCTC, Rapid, or CTL timecodes. Includes 2 integrated frame synchronizers and over 200 pre-programmed real time digital video mixing effects. Video processing adjusts contrast, brightness, & saturation. Create titles, logos & graphics in any Windows appl.
Control Cable Kit – $75.00

SALE $1999

Multi I/O (RS232/422) $2750.00

DTV prices fluctuate, Call for current quote.

Quadrant Q Motion 100

Capture video at full-speed (60 fields/second) in full-screen resolutions (640x480) for under $500!!
Capture, edit & output high-quality digital video at a low cost. Powerful bit-rate control & custom media stream bus lets you optimize the card to match your system & hard drive performance, guaranteeing high-quality results from any system. Incoming video can be displayed in real-time on an external monitor or TV via composite or S-VHS output of card. May be displayed on computer monitor, at a reduced frame rate.

SALE $479.00

Q-Motion 150: Complete bundle including Adobe Premiere 4.0 LE & Photoshop LE & CeQuadrat PixelShrink MPEG Encoder software.

SALE $649.00

Quadrant Q-Motion PCI

Unleash the power of 32 bit video capture and playback for under $1000!!
PCI gives you the fastest possible throughput for the absolute highest quality 640x480 S-VHS quality video capture. 32 bit PCI bus eliminates dropped frames for jitter free playback at 30 frames/60 fields per second. Q-Motion PCI is the first Motion-JPEG video editing card to use Burst DMA (Direct Memory Access) to transfer video data to and from memory. Burst DMA takes full advantage of the PCI bus giving you superior video quality with the least possible compression. Works with Win 3.1, Win95 and Win NT.

QM-200 PCI card only **$899.00**
Call for complete bundles with software

Power Pixel Pixelock

32 bit video titling system for video professionals. Pixelock is a complete overlay, genlock and scan converter system. User selectable key colors let you fully utilize the world's leading titling and graphics software including Flying Fonts, Primetime, Deputy CG, and more. Alpha channel supports 256 levels of transparency for total control and layering of digitized images and graphics.

Complete 2 board system includes: PixelMaker high performance VGA card and graphics accelerator; Pixelock 24 bit VGA to NTSC encoder board w/built-in genlock; and Curtain Call titling software.

VESA Local Bus system **$699.00**
PCI Bus system **$799.00**

Turtle Beach Multi Sound Monterey
The Only Sound Card for Digital Video!

Designed by musicians for musicians, so you know you are getting the absolute best sound available. Monterey provides CD-quality, noise free hard disk recording on your PC. WaveFront technology turns your PC into a professional MIDI mixer and synthesizer with effects. The Hurricane architecture processes the audio on the card and speeds up audio throughout. This optimizes your AVI compression and lets you get the maximum video quality from your capture card.

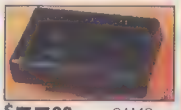
NEW $349.00 (reg. $545.00 ea)

AZDEN

Use two wireless mics at the same time! The Azden WR2PRO two channel receiver automatically mixes the sound from both mics. Let us design the perfect two mic system for your needs. Complete systems including WR2PRO & two wireless mics. **$399.00 & up**

WR2PRO receiver **$189.00**

Mic Mixer



Record and mix sound from 3 sources, while shooting! Connect 2 mics plus background music to your camcorder's audio.

$55.00 CAM3

WLXPRO
Professional VHF Wireless Mic System
250' Range
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WHXPRO-Wireless Handheld VHF Pro Mic System **$189.00**

ECZ 990 Picks up sound in front without side noises. 2 position zoom/wide. **$69.95**

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Delivers superior frequency response. Multiple channel operation - ten frequencies available. Features volume control & balanced/unbalanced output – interfaces with both video cameras & all sound systems. Flexible rubber antenna & squelch/mute

$299.00 and up

GOLD DISK VideoDirector

Turns your PC or Mac, camcorder & VCR into a complete editing system. Choose the shots, drag & drop into order and "Make Tape" for assembly.

$99.95

Ulead Systems MediaStudio Pro 2.0

Non-Linear Editing Software
Catalog, edit, add special effects filters, morph, & warp. Combine video, animation still images, titling and audio.
*(requires capture card)

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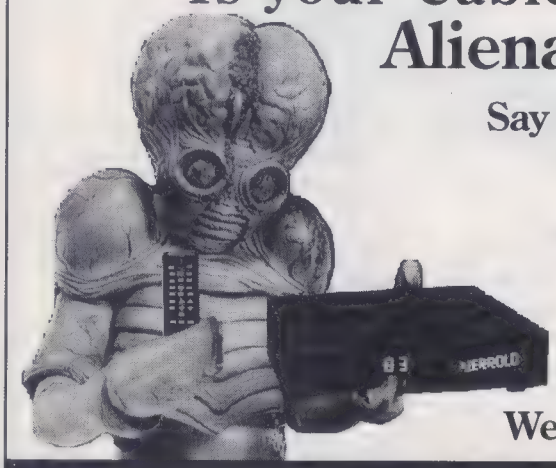

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Just plug into any comport, load the software and start editing! Here's what you can do: ■Edit and arrange scenes from any Control L or IR camcorder ■View your video on your VGA monitor ■Capture Picons and make a graphical timeline edit decision list ■Create awesome titles and transitions using Curtain Call ■AVer Video Editor superimposes your titles over the video footage automatically.

$489.00

AVerKey 3
Hi-Resolution Scan Converter

Display VGA output from your computer to any TV or VCR! Provides VGA, composite, SVHS & RGB output with resolutions up to 800x600. True Plug and Play. Remote control operations lets you zoom and pan to any area of the screen, plus freeze. **Powerful presentation too!**

AVerKey PC $289.00 AVerKey Mac/PC $389.00

AVer Video Suite Complete Windows Based DTV Editing System!

Our fully integrated bundle gives you video editing, 2D and 3D titling, plus special effects in one easy to use package. Custom modified VideoDirector 2.5 lets you edit from any Control L camcorder and modified Curtain Call lets you add titles, fades, wipes, graphics, and animation with the click of the mouse. AVer Pro broadcast quality display card is SVHS/Hi8 compatible with 1 MB RAM and flicker fixer.

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Ulead Systems

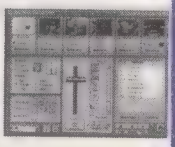
Media Studio Pro 2.0 Advanced Non Linear Editing Software

Create full motion digital videos with one fully integrated program. Catalog, edit, add special effects filters, morph, and warp ■ well as combine video, animation still images, anti-aliased titling, and audio, all with point and click ease *(software only - requires video capture card)*

SALE $289.95 *Special - $20 off Media Studio Pro with any additional DTV purchase*

Movie Machine Pro

FAST The Art of Digital Video.



Turn your PC into a state-of-the-art digital video mixer & titler for under $500

18 A/B roll video effects, Chroma & Luma keying and more! Built in TV tuner. Framegrabber import titles & graphics from any Windows application and overlay them on video.

ON SALE $439.95

Movie Line Motion JPEG Bundle
AFFORDABLE...Non Linear Editing on your Hard Drive

Using high-quality Motion - JPEG compression, this hybrid system gives you non-linear editing &/or real time digital effects. Bundle includes MM Pro, M-JPEG card plus Adobe Premier 4.0LE & Photoshop LE. Autodesk Animator Pro CD & Xing MPEG Conversion software.

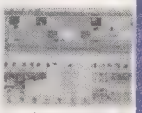
COMPLETE BUNDLE ONLY $869.00

SVHS Hi Resolution Non-Linear Editing System

Turn your home PC into a state-of-the-art digital video production studio. Create commercials, high-lite films, music videos and more! Video capture at up ■ 320x480, 30 frames & 60 fields per second. Integrated single board solution for super easy installation. Works with SVHS & Composite Systems

$839.00

Fast Video Machine Lite

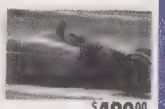


A/B Roll Editing Suite w/Edit Control and DVE Effects!

Fully integrated system blosw away higher priced component editing suites. Everything you need in one ISA card. Can be used for A/B roll, A/X roll & audio/video split editing. Supports LANC(SonyControl L), Control ■ (Pana 5 pin). Includes 2 integrated frame synchronizers and over 200 pre-programmed real time digital video mixing effects.

Multi 1/0 (RS232/422) $2750.00 SALE INCLUDING CABLES $2265.00

Quadrant Q Motion 100

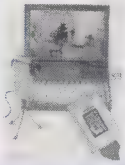


Capture video at full speed (60 fields/second) in full-screen resolutions (640x480) for under $500!!

Capture, edit and output high-quality digital video at a low cost. Powerful bit-rate control and custom media stream bus lets you optimize the card to match your system and hard drive performance, quaranteeing high-quality results from any system. Incoming video can be displayed in real time on an external monitor or TV via composite or SVHS output of card.

$489.00

Q-Motion 150 Complete bundle including Adobe Premiere 4.0 LE & Photoshop LE & CeQuadrat PixelShrink MPEG Encoder software $669.00



CardCam VideoIn

Now you can capture video with your Laptop or Notebook computer! High quality still image andvideo capture card for PCMCIA Type II equipped computers! True color frame grabbing & video captuer (15 Fps, 320x240 resolution), plus all the software you need to capture video to your hard drive!

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CAMCORDERS

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HI-8MM, STEREO, IMAGE STABILIZER COLOR VIEWFINDER

CCD-TRV70 ...$1269.99
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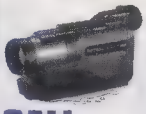

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75
76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105
106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135
136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150
151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165
166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180
181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195

1. What size is your primary viewing TV?
   A☐ 20"-25" B☐ 25"-27" C☐ 27"-32" D☐ 35"+
2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
   E☐ 0-2 F☐ 3-5 G☐ 6-10
3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
   H☐ 1 hour I☐ 1 day J☐ 1 week K☐ No Planning
4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
   L☐ Yes M☐ No
5. Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?
   N☐ Daily Newspaper O☐ Cable Guide P☐ Weekly Newspaper Insert
   Q☐ TV Guide R☐ Other
6. How many programs do you tape per week?
   S☐ 1-5 T☐ 5-7 U☐ 7+
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75
76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105
106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120
121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135
136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150
151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165
166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180
181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195

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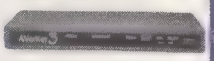

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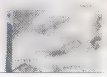

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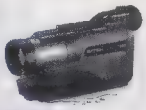

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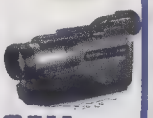

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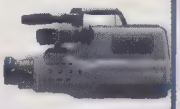

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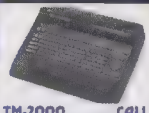

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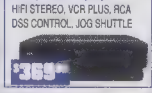

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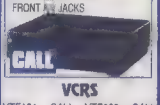

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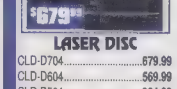

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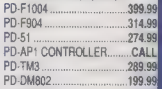

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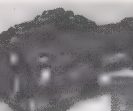
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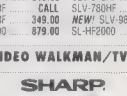
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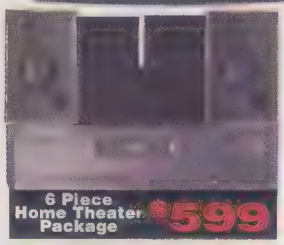

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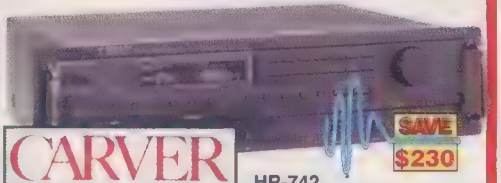

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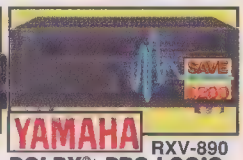

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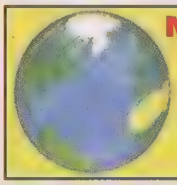

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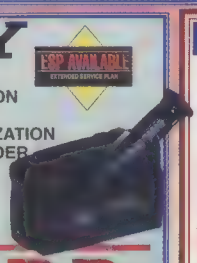

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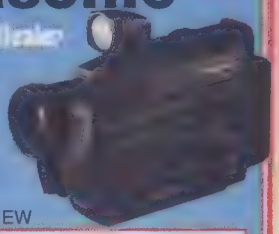

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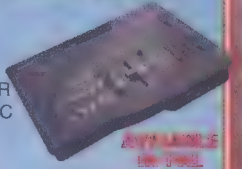

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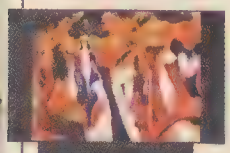

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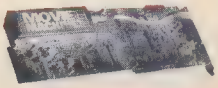

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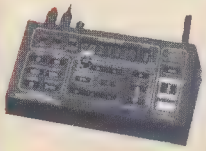

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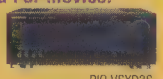

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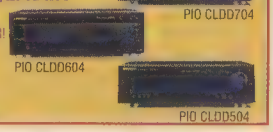

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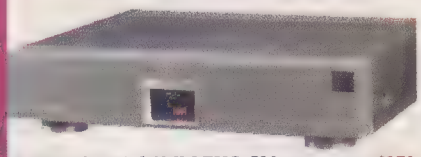

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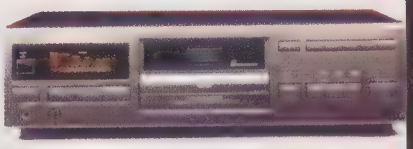

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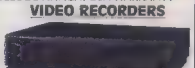

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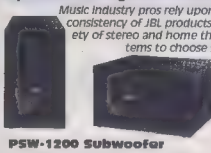

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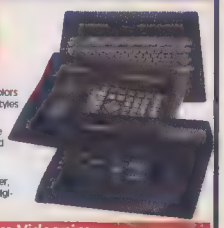

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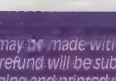

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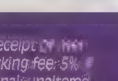

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3. **Understand the product's warranty.** Is there a manufacturer's warranty, and if so, is it from a U.S. or foreign manufacturer? **Note that many manufacturers assert that, even if the product comes with a U.S. manufacturers warranty card, if you purchase from an unauthorized dealer, you are *not* covered by the manufacturer's warranty. If in doubt, contact the manufacturer directly.** In addition to, or instead of, the manufacturer's warranty, the seller may offer its own warranty. In either case, what is covered by warranty, how long is the warranty period, where will the product be serviced, what do you have to do, and will the product be repaired or replaced? You may want to receive a copy of the written warranty before placing your order.
4. **Keep a copy of all transactions,** including cancelled checks, receipts and correspondance. For phone orders, make a note of the order including merchandise ordered, price, order date, expected delivery date and salesperson's name.
5. **If the merchandise is not shipped within the promised time** or if no time was promised, 30 days of receipt of the order, you generally have the right to cancel the order and get a refund.
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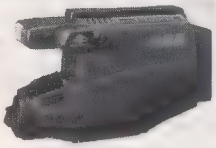

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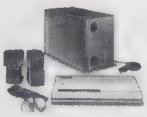

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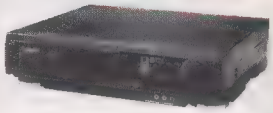

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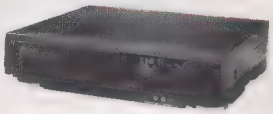

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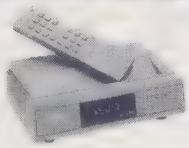

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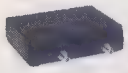

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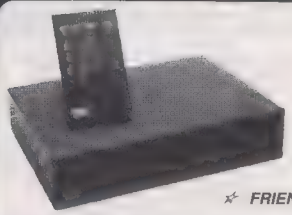

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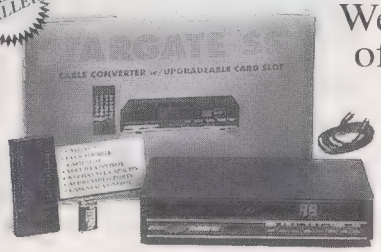

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With the right movie, you're never really alone (even on Valentine's Day)

LOVE HURTS

HOME VIDEO HAS MADE OUR LIVES EASIER, BUT YOU'D NEVER know it on Valentine's Day, which will be gushing along any day now. Confusion reigns all over the country, and on The Big Night folks will be wandering cluelessly up and down the aisles of video stores. Some will wonder whether their significant other will find a particular title suitably romantic. Others—including recent divorcées, Don Juans gone to seed, and perennial wallflowers—will be looking for ways to ease (or bury) the pangs they feel for missing out on the romance industry's number-one marketing concept.

Those involved in a mature, successful relationship probably won't need help—you have a favorite movie, and even if you don't nothing you bring home is likely to rock the boat. So relax; the pressure's off. (One hint: Avoid *In the Realm of the Senses* [1976]—a film worth seeing under other circumstances, perhaps, but I have to disagree with its central premise: Castration is *not* the ultimate turn-on.)

If you're looking to land yourself in one of those warm, snuggly long-term relationships that might deserve eventual sitcom treatment, I suggest heading for the Horror section. Many important psychologists have noted that strong emotions are often tied together: People who share an upsetting experience build a bond that may lead to love. So look for a truly scary movie—not one that's simply stomach-turning. *Psycho* (1960), or the original *Cape Fear* (1962, with Robert Mitchum and Gregory Peck), is perfect. Be prepared to explain why you've shown up on Valentine's Day with a horror movie, though.

Lonely folks need all the help they can get. It's bad enough being single, separated, or divorced without a month's worth of advertising and theme episodes of your favorite TV shows shoving insanely happy couples in your face every minute. Knowing that you'll be saving lots of money on flowers, candy, a new outfit, an expensive dinner, or maybe—*yikes!*—diamonds isn't always enough. Soon, though, you'll be over the worst, and find yourself back in that quiet gray world where you're much more comfortable. But on Valentine's Day, don't run from your misery—face it head on. Get a movie or two that depicts the downside of romance, something to convince you that things really could be worse.

Taylor in *Woolf*, Douglas in *Roses*, Cathy Tyson in *Mona Lisa*

Probably no film casts marriage in a harsher light than *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966), as Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor use every weapon at their intellectual disposal to destroy each other over a long, drunken weekend. Add a physical element and you've got *The War of the Roses* (1989), in which Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner literally battle for custody of the material gains they've accumulated. These films not only make you glad you're not married, but thankful you got out alive.

Henry Jaglom takes a more gentle approach as he replays the breakup of his own marriage—with a cast composed of his real ex-wife and in-laws—in *Always* (1985). If you want an example of how mature people can separate, go on with their lives, and retain a connection, look to *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1980), *Comfort and Joy* (1984), or *Truly Madly Deeply* (1990), three warm comedies about people who think they'll never survive the loss of their lover—but do anyway.

If you have something a bit more carnal in mind, don't embarrass yourself (or waste your time) by renting one of those tacky "erotic thrillers"—they're neither erotic nor thrilling. (Studies have shown that nine out of 10 video-store clerks will laugh at you behind your back if you rent one of these . . . and you've had enough humiliation for one day.) Instead, look for either *Deadly Weapons* (1970) or *Double Agent 73* (1974), two movies made by Doris Wishman, the female Ed Wood. Both feature Chesty Morgan, whose pudgy stripper kills men by smothering them in her 73-inch bosom. You might also try Paul Bartel's hilarious *Eating Raoul* (1983), a satire about sexual libertines that makes celibacy seem like the only dignified way to live. Ease off David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1978), though—it takes human sexuality to repulsive extremes. (Repulsion, or Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* [1965], for that matter, isn't a good bet when you're feeling so fragile.)

If unrequited love is what torments you (and torment is what you love), get a copy of *Mona Lisa* (1986), the film that put Irish director Neil Jordan (*The Crying Game*) on the map. On the lighter side, Ross McElwee pokes fun at his own unsuccessful quest for love in the documentary *Sherman's March* (1985). Really, what could be more romantic on Valentine's Day than a good documentary? —*M. Faust*

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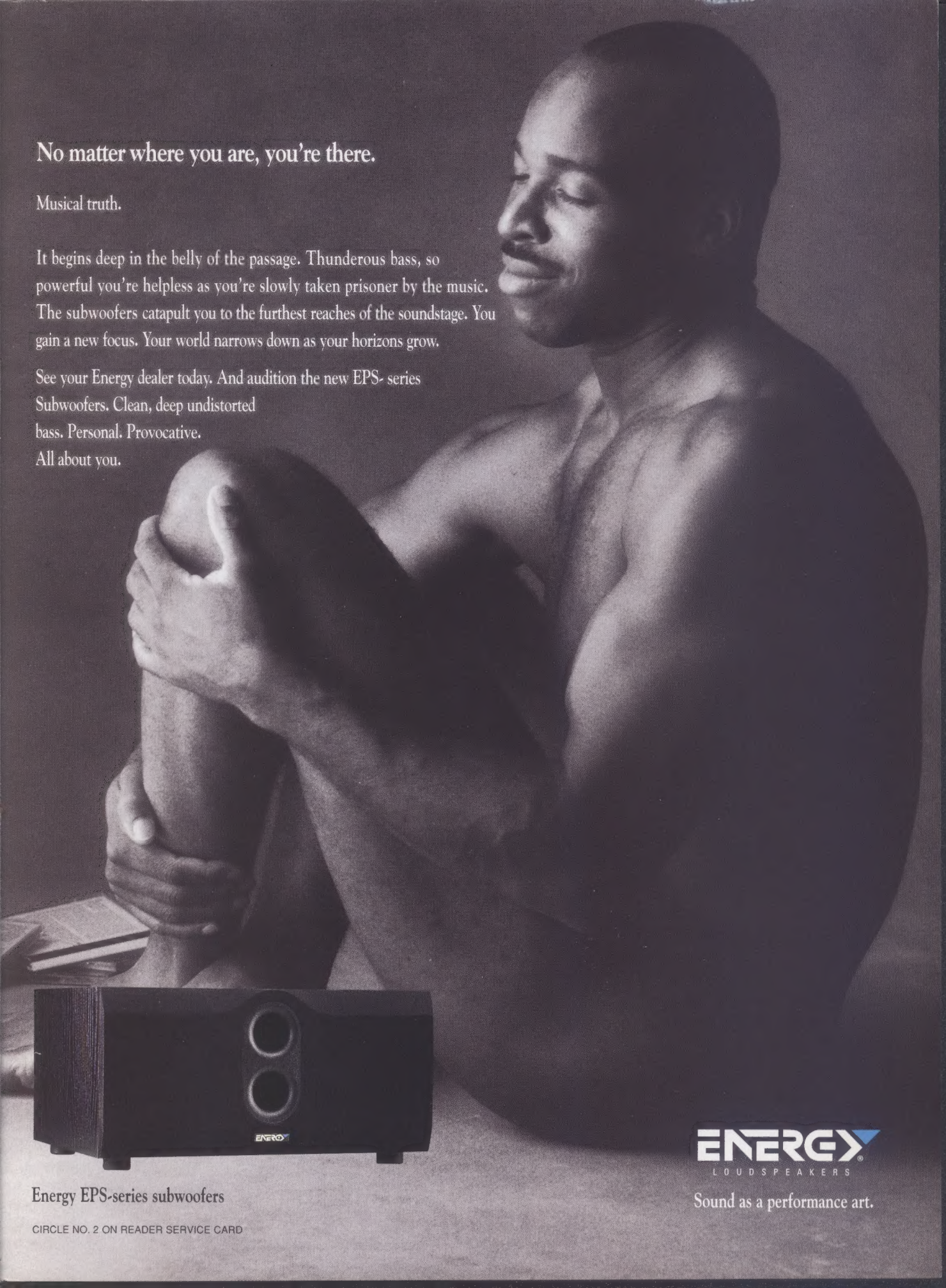
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